

The Gift of Art, Sculpture Ventures for Young Artists

"The visual artist's gift is the ability to see the tree within the seed, the spine within the blade of grass, and the whisper in the willow."

The setting; Ragdale, a historical landmark and artist's retreat on Chicago's north shore. The purpose; The Gift of Art workshop, conducted by Yale Alum, Margot McMahon. A gathering of other Yale alum, family and friends, convened on a recent daffodil filled Saturday morning to learn about additive, subtractive and constructive sculpting processes.

Margot facilitated the group's hands on experience of bringing an artistic vision from flat pieces of paper to three dimensions. With a theme of Alexander Calder's "Cirque", Margot inspired the group to create their own three-ring circus... and over a 1.5-hour period, this gathering joined forces to do just that.

It was an extraordinary group engaged in an extraordinary learning experience that culminated in highly animated circus performance. Young children and their parents together envisioned and constructed a circus horse and rider and a cannon that propelled performers high over the performance tent. A woman brought a trapeze artist to life, while another helped her gleeful autistic brother build a tight rope walker. The circus performance was punctuated by a musical chime sculpture developed from stainless steel plates and screws that once held another participants bones together.

Under Margot's care, in a special place of creativity – a collection of strangers were given a gift of art and art appreciation. Margot notes, "What makes this workshop tick has a bit of wonder, but I am always gratified by the unifying and community building culmination in the collaborative circus performance that levels all playing fields and brings people together. Maybe that is what art does?"

The strategy for the workshop is neatly spelled out in the publication *The Gift of Art: Sculpture Ventures for Young Adults*, produced this year by Yale Printing and Publishing Services. Since the book's release, the power of the Gift of Art is being realized through a series of workshops starting with an all day Yale Center for British Art's workshop at Chapel Haven Center, New Haven, Ct and followed by four Chicago based workshops at The Oak Park Art League, The Evanston Art Center, Next Door and Ragdale Foundation.

Margot explains, "The range of adult professionals who have come to learn how to offer children workshops to make sculptures has been inspiring. Already a minister, architect, and a social worker for children's cancer hospital have learned these processes and plan to use them for sacramental preparation, school projects and a summer camp for patients and their siblings this year."

"Ragdale in Schools" will offer "The Gift of Art" to twenty artists to adapt this sculptural workshop to their own disciplines of dance, painting, choreography and sculpture to teach children art. Twenty workshops for elementary students will be given in Zion and Waukegan schools in 2016.

A Gift of Art Workshop for adults and children is scheduled at the Oak Park Library main branch on Saturday, June 25 from 10-12. For more information or a copy of The Gift of Art book visit margotmcmahon.com

"The Gift of Art" is, I hope, going to be a great success and a huge help to many people. It is so accessible and practical. Well done, congratulations!"

--Garth Evans