

Experiencing Art

by

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Growing up in New York City, allowed me to experience art. All around me was art, The Statue of Liberty, museums, Broadway Shows, as well as the many cultural art studios. Art was represented in many different communities and expressed on buildings as murals. Music and the sounds of different cultures were everywhere. I enjoyed the diversity of the arts and came to appreciate art as a form of self-expression among cultures. The city of New York was its own art gallery: food, sidewalks, bridges, walls, buildings, people, rap, break dancing. Art was represented in purposeful sound created with speakers in parks and in underground subway platforms. New York was an active art gallery. There was seasonal outdoor art. During an ice storm, artist would create ice art. In the summer, the trees and flowers became art. At Christmas time my family enjoyed touring the stores at night where on display were human and robotic mannequins. New York was robust and vibrant. Public art was in the open for all to appreciate and enjoy. Professional dancer and singers were my neighbors. My parents encouraged art in its many forms, by taking me to museums, parades, block parties, and the circus. They nurtured creativity by bragging on me and stating to others, "Lynette is creative". This was my home and city. This was my life outside of the classroom.

There was a clear disconnect between the freedom of self-expression in the streets of New York and my New York elementary classrooms. It was clear that my religious private school teachers did not have the tools or training to nurture self-expressive art. We were a

subject-based school. In English, I remember visualizing my creative stories, but never creating a visualization for them. Good grades, in all my classes, were given to those that could retain and regurgitate facts. I spent 8 years in my elementary school and most of the time we did not have an art or music teacher. In middle school, when the art and music teachers moved into the area, they taught their subjects once a week. There was no attempt to integrate any core subjects with art. My parents were very vocal, insisting that teachers focused on standardized tests. In order to not interfere with “learning”, the talented and gifted stayed after school to work with the music, or art teacher, preparing seasonal Plays. Selected students were chosen to create backdrops or be the lead singers - Never ME. Yet I knew that I possess the individuality and creativity seen on the streets of New York. The standardized tests could not measure my creative skills and I wanted to show my uniqueness through art.

High School was where my artistic and creative abilities were nurtured. My Manhattan high school forced me to travel through 3 boroughs (Queen, Brooklyn, Manhattan). I met New York subway musicians and artists. Everyday objects were turned into music. An orchestra of street musicians, carrying cans for cash, used trash cans and forks to make music. I saw art being used to express feelings and create moods. Unlike the elementary teachers and students which were all from Queens, the high school teachers and students were from different boroughs. The high school teachers allowed themselves to make connections between core subjects using art. In English class, I was encouraged to write songs and poetry. In Geography and history, the teacher helped us create chants and raps to learn facts and dates. It was my life outside of the classroom, and my Manhattan high school that nurtured my creativity and celebrated my uniqueness. Art was a way of expression. A way to view the world.

Once in college, I look forward to taking an art class. I had met college students in New York. They were outspoken and creative. New York City had provided me with the best self-expressive education. I attended college in the Deep South, Alabama. My southern art appreciation class did not teach me about form, or style. I did not learn about shapes and unique ways to express myself. Instead, the required art appreciation class was about the history of art and studying the different artists and time periods. My whole grade rested on creating a book, about 100 pages, of artists and their time periods. Art was once again a stand-alone subject. I wanted to learn more about art and how to integrate it in my life. Was there money in creative art? Was I going to be a panhandling artists limited to the subways of New York? What would my parents think of me, taking my college education only to become a struggling artist? My educational classes were all methods of teaching the core subjects.

New York had shaped me into this self-expressive teacher. My classroom was not going to be just subject-based. Art would be a form of self-expression and a learning tool. My high school teachers and the city of New York had taught me well. Lessons must be formatted to represent this uniqueness of the teacher and class. Dancing, rapping, and traveling through time periods are part of learning in my class. My students love to come to school. Parents describe me as interactive.

I view art as self expression. It is not limited to one subject, and it has many forms. My students excel, My kindergarten class has been tested as reading and writing two and three grade levels above Kindergarten. I am a self-expressive artist from New York, and my classroom is the canvas.

