

Bringing art to the people

If your job puts you smack dab in the middle of a wealth of artwork—depicting diverse swaths of human experience across centuries and cultural expanses, with such overwhelming volume of perspective that it may seem impossible to ever fully appreciate—you might work at the Crocker Art Museum. **Stacey Shelnut-Hendrick** does. She's **director of education**, overseeing programs that share art with the community in unique ways—the mobile Art Ark, ArtMix, film nights, tours and, most recently, the Black History Month celebration. SN&R talked to her about the recent celebration and art education.

How did the Black History Month celebration go?

It went really well. ... People seemed to be really pleased with not only the performances but being able to make connections with people they hadn't seen in years.

What was new this year?

This year we introduced film, which I wasn't too sure about, but it seems that it went really well. There are so many different filmmakers in Sacramento, and we really want to focus on people, particularly African-Americans, contributing to making films in Sacramento. *Lady Bird* was an amazing feat, and it really was important to me to have stories of African-Americans being told on film as well.

How is putting on an event in Sacramento different than other places?

I feel like sometimes there's a fine balance. I definitely put the emphasis on trying to showcase local talent. I want it to be 75 percent showcasing who's in Sacramento, who's doing what, and not only who's doing what, but who's doing something new.

So Deborah Pittman, who redid her Small Shoulders/Big Dreams production, she had recently received a creative economy grant from the City of Sacramento to revamp that and to engage students in the whole history of Ruby Bridges, and I thought it was really important to show what Deborah was doing recently in the last year. ... And then I actually really try to think of ways to introduce groups from out of the area so that the reach doesn't feel so localized, that we feel part of California or part of the country.



Stacey Shelnut-Hendrick is the Crocker's fearless museum educator.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CROCKER ART MUSEUM/BRIAN SUHR

What kind of stories do you like to tell in educating people?

Generally, I like to sort of focus on how art plays a role in our everyday life, and I think that's what I really love about the Jacob Lawrence exhibition, is that he was really trying to show the beauty of some of the simpler creative forms, so he was looking at the carpenters and the construction industry.

And so we had hair stylists and people working with natural hair [with the] 100 Nappy Hair Tales showcase. It was just sort of the artistry in something as simple as hair styling, in that it's not just something that happens. Within African-American culture, and even going back to Africa with cornrows and different haircuts, [people] have really accentuated hair to a higher art form.

Are there any challenges you face in educating people about art?

I think once art is in a museum, it becomes sort of fine art. ... I think that's something we want to get away from, this sort of hierarchy of art. ... We really want to value creativity and how people are using different aspects of creative art forms—music, dance, visual arts—to express themselves, to protest, to give a voice to people who are voiceless, to share their humanity. □

Visit crockerart.org for more information on the museum's programs.

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