

# Cycleback Art Outreach Final Report 2010



**Cycleback Art Outreach: Executive Summary:**

Cycleback Art Outreach (CAO) is a program that introduces the creative and empowering aspects of making art. The opportunity for expression, exploration and play for marginalized residents of the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood focuses on an environment of safety and encouragement in the facilitation of creative self expression. Cycleback Art Outreach actively seeks out participants for the program with its pedal powered mobile workshop & gallery, engaging the community in parks or other outdoor locations. In addition, the program reaches out to community centers, non-profits or any part of Mount Pleasant where there is a need or interest. CAO provides the participants with an open discussion about art, and art in public places. This conversation helps to build relationships between outreach workers and homeless/marginalized clients. Individuals from these various groups effectively become advisory committee members through informal interviews and discussion in the field to help focus the direction of the overall project. This is followed by an invitation to create art on-the-spot with supplies provided from the back of the mobile art studio. This also creates the perfect context to talk about and promote the Cycleback project, encouraging suitable candidates to learn how they can enroll in the program to become bike mechanics.

**Chapters:**

- Methodology
- Advisory committee interviews
- Program strategy: Weekly workshops & CAO program events
- Success stories
- Cycleback Art Outreach & Cycleback
- Conclusion
- Educational material on the Mandala (distributed in workshops)
- Gallery

**Methodology:**

CAO is a community based program that facilitates workshops focusing on artistic expression and self discovery. This is accomplished through weekly public drop-in workshops in parks and green spaces as well as scheduled events with youth focused non-profit organizations from the Mt. Pleasant area. CAO embraces and encourages local youth and the homeless of the Mount Pleasant area to use art as a method to promote a sense of increased self understanding and as a catalyst for building confidence, while celebrating diversity. CAO also embraces bicycle culture as a foundation for self expression with its pedal powered art workshop outreach vehicle. CAO actively seeks out homeless & marginalized people in the community and engages them in a discussion about art as well as providing all the art supplies to make their own unique creation.

**Mandala:**

*A circular canvas which invites the participant to express some aspect of who they are or what they feel.* The workshop creates a framework of time (60-90 min) to complete a single piece of work. The time restriction helps motivate and inspire the participants to complete the piece without too much thought or preparation.

**CAO on Facebook:**

As part of this project, a Facebook page was created that acts as a communications hub for the program as well as providing an online gallery for the resulting art created: [www.tinyurl.com/cyclebackart](http://www.tinyurl.com/cyclebackart)

**Advisory Committee: What do you think about art & art in public places?**

**Youth (Group 1):** 7:00 pm April 23rd Meeting at the MPNH  
(16 Participants ages 13 to 19)

1. Ground/cement mosaics - There are a number of Mosaics embedded into sidewalks around Vancouver. There was consensus that they are very effective as art and as a community building endeavor. Some of the Mosaics tell a story visually and can help enhance identity and a sense of history.

Ideas: Chalk mandalas, cement mosaics/stepping stones, cement mandalas.

2. Murals: There are a number of wall murals around the Mount Pleasant community that the committee identified. These include the one directly across the street from the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (which many of the kids actually worked on) as well as some other walls in various locations around Mt. Pleasant. This led to the conversation about "art in unexpected places" - some of the murals are "unofficial" spray can art works that the committee recognized. The specific art identified by the kids was whimsical and novel (such as dancing carrots etc). It may be the juxtaposition of the intent behind spray can art and its transformation from property damage/protesting/mischief, to whimsical expressions of art in unexpected places that capture the imagination of the kids.

Ideas: Spray can art mandalas, back alley galleries and other low traffic locations throughout Mt. Pleasant.

3. Spirit Bears/ Eagles:

Placed around the city for the past few years, the Spirit bears are very effective art installations for a variety of reasons. The committee expressed that it was how each Bear was uniquely painted and located that made them compelling. Also the basic shape of each piece is exactly the same, so a sense of familiarity with the Spirit Bear is achieved. The expression of art is created by the unique artistic treatment each one undergoes.

Creating a familiar shape or canvas helps creates an emotional connection to a piece and helps accentuate the individuality of each work.

4. Art made of natural/organic materials: Art pieces that are composed of found/natural objects and materials, such as rocks, wood/drift wood & found objects. This concept accentuates identifying organically occurring art & beauty in nature. The ART happens when the INTENT of the artist is to combine elements and objects artistically to create something totally new.

5. Inspiration by other artists: The committee identified a number of artists like Jackson Pollack and Vincent Van Gogh, as well as genres of art like Pointillism, impressionism and more. These artists and these kinds of art may serve as inspiration for styles and techniques to explore in the form of the Mandala. This insight can be incorporated into the Mandala workshop by encouraging the participants to create tribute or pay homage to their favorite artists, (i.e. recreating Van Gogh's "Starry Night" as a Mandala).

6. Quotes & Ideas: One participant asked about quotes: "Can we use quotes in our Mandala"? I responded: "NO words and NO logos" - A rule of the city of Vancouver for public art. For this reason, I challenged the participants to translate quotes into pictures or pictogram's to communicate the same information in a purely visual way.

7. Collage: Some participants talked about collage and similar methods to create a Mandala. I encouraged them to clip any kind of image, texture or graphic that they could incorporate into their piece(s).

### **Advisory Committee Interviews: Homeless (Group 2)**

#### **Jack: Homeless Recycler April 29th**

Jack has been one of the homeless for many years. In his recent past, he was terribly burned which makes recovery while living on the streets a real challenge. His burns and scarring resulted in a countenance that made him especially isolated even from other homeless people. That being said, Jack had a deep understanding of art as well as some interesting perspectives behind the motivation of artists. I asked Jack about ART and his general insights about art. In addition, I spoke to him about any kind of art installations that he has seen around Vancouver that he likes.

1. Fiberglass Whales: Jack identified the killer whale sculptures that were placed around the city a few years ago. He said that he liked the fact that this idea must be unique to Vancouver (because of the killer whale motif). He also explained that he appreciated that the whales were placed in unusual locations around the city.

2. Jack talked about finding art in back alleys around Vancouver: This "found art" is something that he collects and sometimes sells. He said that he found a Matisse print, carried it around for a few days and then sold it to someone who saw the print on his bike trailer.

3. **Mentally ill artists:** Jack talked about a number of famous artists who were mentally ill who created incredible art. He also talked about art that was worth millions of dollars, yet seemed to be not worth the price, like pieces created by Jackson Pollack or the "Red Strip" painting in the big gallery from Ottawa (his home town) that sold for many millions of dollars.

4. **Art to sell:** He was interested in learning about art that he could sell. Either art he makes or finds.

### **"Hippy Bear": Homeless Recycler**

May 05 2010 at the Bottle Depot

I asked Bear about Public Art that he has seen that has some kind of meaning for him.

1. Naturally occurring art: Bear described that he sees art all around him. His vision frames everything from a stack of recycling that appears artfully arranged to his friends gathered in a park talking about life. He sees art and interesting compositions everywhere especially in nature. He went on to describe the ultimate art is nature itself. The solitude that nature can afford allows the space for personal reflection and a form of meditation that is "good for the soul". He said that his "getting away from it all" allows him to appreciate a simple and artful perspective to living.

2. Counter culture art: Spray can art (Graffiti) - He said that he likes any kind of art that embraces counter culture.

3. Cavemen: Bear talked about a work that whimsically depicts cave men. I asked him why cavemen, and he said that the caveman embraces the primitive part of all of us which is maybe where art comes from. He would like to see more work that captures the primitive nature of mankind.

4. Mandala: I asked Bear about the Mandala and he said that he was very familiar with the art form. He went on to say that he used to do LSD with his brother and go to the library to look at Mandala artwork, which he reported experiencing as very rewarding and mind expanding.

5. Art in encyclopedias: Bear carries a number of encyclopedias with him. He said that he often looks at the art and information in these books and finds himself comforted by the books themselves. He said that he would have a number of books open at night (wherever he is bunking down that night) and will leave the books open and fall asleep. In the morning, he will go to the books to see the information he looked at the night before which seemed to create some kind of sense of continuity in his life.

**Don: Homeless Recycler**

Jonathan Rogers Park June 3<sup>rd</sup>

Don has been on the streets for over 10 years. I asked him about art in public places:

1. Found Art: Don mentioned that he finds art in back alleys or where ever he can. In some cases, he will bring the art along with him and keep it in his shopping cart, or in some cases he has even sold the art he has found.
2. Murals: Don talked about a number of murals in the city that he likes. He went on to say that there is a big difference between graffiti and art. He described that the intent of the artist is instantly apparent.
3. Unintentional performance art: Not just graphic art, but the naturally occurring art that happens when people get together and talk in a park; it is a matter of indentifying those moments as they happen during the course of their day.
4. Art in unusual locations: A common theme from the committee, Don talked about discovering art in unexpected locations and how that enhances the experience for both the artist and the viewer.

**Charlie: Homeless Recycler**

Jonathan Rogers Park June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Charlie has been on the streets for over ten years. I asked him about art in general as well as art installs around the city. He talked about some of his favorite artists (Van Gogh's "Starry Night"), but he had never really thought about art before in this context. Once he started talking, he was surprised by his own reaction and that he knew more about art than he realized. His feedback was very similar to other homeless people I spoke with.

1. Found Art
2. Art in unexpected places
3. Spray can art murals located around the city

The main feedback from Charlie was that public art installations really do affect the average citizen of the city including homeless and marginalized people. Art displayed in public locations provide not only beautification, but demonstrates that the city itself is reaching out beyond the traditional art gallery to the streets where art can have the most positive effect on people as they live their daily lives.

### **Residents of Mount Pleasant (Group 3)**

#### **Courtney (31): Guelph Park**

Long time resident of Mount Pleasant and member of Pemberton First Nations

1. Art in non-traditional locations: Courtney talked about responding to art that is displayed in unexpected locations around the city. She likes the Spirit Bears and Killer Whales that have become beloved Vancouver landmarks.
2. Art in and around community gardens: The green spaces created by local community groups create a tangible form of art. The gardens themselves create an artistic composition that makes her feel happy and grounded.
3. Murals: She talked about a variety of Murals around Vancouver that she really loves, and described them as “whimsical and fun”: She talked about a number of works, in some cases photo realistic murals that create a feeling of counter culture or a sense of fantasy to juxtapose the reality of city life.

#### **Anita (51): South China Creek Park**

Anita, a long time resident of Mount Pleasant is a low income grandmother who provides child care for her daughter on a daily basis. I asked Anita about art and how it enriches her community:

1. Art is important for children to see on a regular basis. It’s a way for the community to express issues, creativity and more. Public art provides an important service in honoring artists and having more than just ad-driven graphics (billboards etc) plastered all over the neighbourhood. She said that public art demonstrates to children that artists play an important role in society.
2. Art in unexpected places: A very popular response and insight. Murals in back alleys etc.
3. Sidewalk Mosaics: She identified a number of sidewalk mosaics around Mount Pleasant and how they add so much to the look and feel of the neighbourhood. In some cases, the mosaics tell local stories and history of Vancouver. It has become evident that sidewalk Mosaics are a very effective and popular form of public art.

**Advisory Committee Recommendations:**

1. Interior Chalk Mandalas: Utilizing the MPNH basement parking lot walls to create a series of chalk Mandalas. Utilizing traditional chalk, the workshop participants will create Mandalas on the walls in the underground parking at the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House. Capturing the essence of the sand mandala, these temporary chalk pieces will conceptually last forever because they are protected from the elements. This pays homage to the oldest artwork known to the modern world, the French cave paintings. These mandalas will last indefinitely underground. The benefit to the MPNH is that the chalk artwork will brighten the walls in the parking lot and make the area more welcoming and inclusive.
2. Exterior Chalk Mandalas: On sidewalks, walls or any reasonable location that is safe and legal. (as determined by the program facilitator)
3. Exterior Cement Mandalas/Stepping Stones: Created with fast setting cement and a one inch tall by 12 inch round cement form, these pieces would be poured in place and decorated with a variety of colorful beads, tiles found objects and more. The elements would all be combined in a pattern and inset into the cement Mandala. These cement Mandalas could be installed in the ornamental garden outside the MPNH as well as in some of the potential community garden locations around Mount Pleasant.
4. Exterior Mandala Murals: Created on treated wood and coated with Marine Varnish, these collaboratively created Mandala Murals would be produced in the workshops by the participants. Once completed and treated, the art would be securely mounted to an available location on the exterior of the MPNH. (North wood wall facing Broadway)
5. Natural Mandalas: Mounted in or around community gardens in the MP area. Leveraging the high traffic area and existing community presence, these natural Mandalas would help beautify the gardens and provide a natural gallery location for a number of pieces. (Would work with community gardens to assist with the basic maintenance of pieces over time)
6. Biodegradable Mandalas: Created on naturally compostable material, these Mandalas would be similar to chalk Mandalas except they are done on paper and attached to objects or in locations where art would be unexpected. This could take the form of paper Mandalas temporarily attached to poles or walls. These Mandalas would break down over a short period of time and naturally biodegrade into the environment.

### Cycleback Art Outreach: Achievements and Successes

- Number of groups engaged on advisory committee = 3
- Number of individuals participating on advisory committee = 22
- Total Number of workshops = 29
- Total participants in workshops = 247
- Number of cultural events facilitated by CAO = 3
  1. Artbomb - Youth Arts festival @ Broadway Youth Resource Center
  2. Velopalooza: Cycleback Art Outreach ride and kiosk
  3. Earthdance Bike Mandala workshop and Parade
- Promotion: Creation of Facebook page: [www.tinyurl.com/cyclebackart](http://www.tinyurl.com/cyclebackart)
- Partnerships & Networks created = 10
- Number of leadership roles: (Youth artists paid honorariums = 2)
- 270+ Mandalas created by workshop participants
- 31 Mandalas installed at City Hall Gardens (+ 8 additional in reserve)
- 7 Mandalas painted on wall Mural at Broadway Youth Resource Center
- 15 Cement Mandalas installed at Mt. Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- 2 Wooden Mandalas installed at Mt. Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- 2 Cement Mandalas installed at Boys & Girls Club
- 1 Wooden Mandala to be installed at Boys & Girls Club
- Creation of a Mandala coloring book which includes original art created by youth artists. (Distributed through the Lookout Society)

### **Cycleback Art Outreach & Cycleback**

Part of the mandate of Cycleback Art Outreach was to promote the Cycleback bike mechanic training program. Currently, there are two workshop participants (Don & Charlie) who have been accepted into the program for September 2010. Both of these individuals were part of the initial advisory committee and regular workshop participants over the summer. In addition, the program helped facilitate the distribution of 6 refurbished bicycles to low income and marginalized youth in Mt. Pleasant.

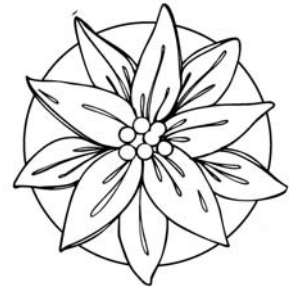
### **Cycleback Art Outreach Conclusion:**

The response from the participants of CAO is that this program is very effective at raising the awareness and appreciation of art. Art is so universal and non-threatening that it is the ideal way to build relationships and break down barriers. Open discussion about art is a very effective way to make marginalized people feel more inclusive in society. In some cases, it was the first time that these homeless people have ever done art in their lives. Even the success of creating a simple piece of original art can help build confidence and optimism to constructively move forward.

## Brief History of the Mandala (Material distributed in workshops)

### Mandalas in Nature

When you think of Mother Nature, graceful, rounded forms come to mind. She is, of course, the origin or mother to Mandalas. Curves, arcs, coils, circles, and spirals are expressed as buds, tendrils, seeds, bubbles, flowers, nests and so much more. From the cycles of the days and seasons to the physical details of plants and animals, from the microcosm of a cell to the macrocosm of the solar system, it is all variations on a single circular theme, beautiful in all its variety.



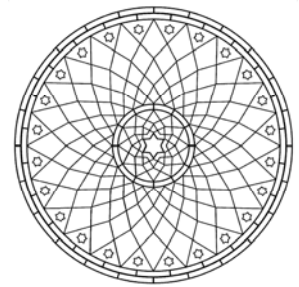
### First Nations

In North America, the First Nations people produced some of the most interesting Mandala structures including sand paintings, dream catchers, and medicine wheels. With the sand paintings, their symbolism included animals and forces of nature.



### India

Although the word Mandala is used in an almost generic way today to describe circular designs, the word itself comes to us from the ancient Hindu language of Sanskrit. Its meaning, literally, is "container of sacred essence". As you study Mandalas more and more, you will come to realize the truth of this definition! It is particularly apt when you consider the sacred architecture of the stupa (temple).



The traditional and familiar form of the structured or geometric Mandala, as we know it today, also originated in India. It is most often associated with Buddhism since creating Mandalas for enlightenment was taught by Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, in the 6th century B.C. However, in India the histories of Buddhism and Hinduism are closely linked, and the Mandala is part of Hindu spiritual practice, as well. Truth be told, Mandalas began in India long before current labels for religious practice even existed. In India's pre-history, a Mandala was not even visual art at all.

The history of the Mandala is very rich. Besides India, many countries and cultures around the world have produced Mandalas. All have a spiritual and healing functions as well as symbolism. Here are just a few of them.

### Celtic

The most notable and best-loved feature of the Celtic designs is, of course, the amazing quality of line. Usually one unbroken line twirls and spirals into a multitude of patterns and figures. The repeated crossing of the line, over itself, was believed to increase protection and ward off evil. Perhaps it was hoped that evil would lose its way in the maze of loops! In a Celtic design called the "love knot", the continuous flow of a single line symbolizes the path of true love, briefly wandering here and there for a while, but always returning home to the beginning. Other Mandala designs, such as those on tombstones or Celtic crosses symbolize the continuity of the cycles of life and the connectedness of all living things.



### Christian

The Christian tradition is replete with Mandalas, from halos to architectural oculi, to rose windows. Then there is the marble paved pattern on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France, which is a Mandala design known as a labyrinth. It has been the primary inspiration for many labyrinths created in the last decade, particularly in the United States. Made with distinctive blue and white tiles laid in quadrants, this 12-circuit labyrinth was used for reflection and penance beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Amazingly, it is the same size and shape as the rose window above it.



### Islamic

In Islam, most sacred art consists of abstractions or geometric shapes, such as squares inside circles. It is understood that God is present in everything, so that a specific representation of the Divine is not necessary and is even considered blasphemous. As with the Indian stupa, a holy mosque becomes a Mandala with the dome representing the heavens and lifting people's hearts and minds toward Allah.



### Tibetan

Perhaps some of the best known Mandalas today are the beautiful designs made of powdered marble and semi-precious stones, created by the Tibetan monks. The Tibetan word for Mandala is *kyil-kor*, which means "center of the universe in which a fully awakened being abides". Again, the truth of this definition becomes more evident, the more you create Mandalas and share information with others.



### Jungian

We can thank Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung for introducing the mandala to the western world. From his experiences and those of his patients, we have a broader definition and a freer application of the mandala than existed originally. Jung championed the spontaneous mandala in contrast to the preplanned, geometric mandalas that existed previously in cultures around the world. Where religious mandalas often have a specified content and format, personal mandalas, such as those fostered by Jung are unlimited in their style, format and symbols. We knew that mandalas represented the universe, but thanks to Jung, we now know that they also represent the universe of the Self.



**About Cycleback Art Outreach:** A pedal powered mobile art workshop engaging Mount Pleasant in ART & promoting the Cycleback project which trains homeless and marginalized people to become bike mechanics. For more information see: <http://www.lookoutsociety.ca/Cycle-Back-Program.html>





