

# The White Elephant

## Creativity, Cultural Arts and Sports

by Nancy Suttles, BFA

*This is part 1 of a series on the cultural arts and creativity in everyday life.*

Tim Rusterholz was recruited by Virginia Commonwealth University for cross-country and track and field. He graduated in 2009 with a BFA in sculpture and extended media. He received his MFA in sculpture from the Tyler School of Art and studied in Rome, Italy, the summer of 2011. He currently lives and works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

How many times have you heard: “Oh, I am not creative, I can’t draw a straight line, and I’m certainly not talented...”? This is only the beginning of the list when it comes to how most people view themselves in terms of being creative. The cultural arts by definition are a collaboration of different art forms, including music, dance, visual art, theater, film and literature. Cultural arts help to explain the world in which we live and often challenge current **ideas, thoughts** and **practice**. Art is often intended to appeal to and connect with human emotion as well as being a form of communication. Many community cultural arts programs are a part of the recreation and parks department and are often overshadowed by the athletic programs. When asked, most recreation and parks professionals will agree that broadening the horizon and incorporating more of the cultural arts is needed, but this is slow in becoming a reality.

“A primary goal of any public park and recreation department is to provide diverse opportunities for people to experience physical and mental challenges. Exposure to the visual and performing arts, crafts, games, puzzles, sports and traditional outdoor activities are some of the many ways parks and recreation can accomplish this goal,” said Bill Beckner, research manager for NRPA. “This goal is enhanced by following the exposure to a new activity with skill development and recreational programs to help individuals gain a modicum of capability in an activity they enjoy. Public recreation programs are a great way for people to get exposure to new and different activities that will be meaningful and possibly open their creativity horizons.”

Believe it or not, human beings are unique in lots of ways — we are capable of acquiring and retaining immense amounts of information over the lifetime of an individual; we are capable of learning and fine-tuning a great many skills and new activities; and we are capable of using and interpreting speech. But one of the most striking species-specific features of *Homo sapiens* is the degree of *creativity* and *innovation* we display in our

thought and behavior, both within the lives of individuals and across different human cultures. This manifests itself in storytelling, in cultural art, in the construction of bodily ornaments and decorations, in humor, in religion-building, in theory-construction, in problem-solving, in technological innovation, the ability to play master and sports and in myriad other ways.<sup>1</sup>

The visual arts have never been more prominent and more available than they are in the early 21st century. People have more opportunities to be involved with the visual arts not only as visitors to galleries and museums but as part of their daily lives. If you take a look around, everything you see has been designed and created by an artist, an engineer, an architect or another creative individual — from the car you drive, the clothes you wear and your choice of digital devices to the home you live in! It really depends on your perspective in how you translate and recognize the importance of being creative and engaging and learning more about the visual arts. With the elimination of many art programs in schools, community arts centers are one of the few places cultural arts programs can flourish if supported. Of special concern are the children ages 2 years to high-school age. This is typically the heaviest concentration of ages that many recreation departments have as participants. That being said, let’s look at the facts for this age group:

Every day, American young people spend more than four hours watching television, DVDs or videos; one hour using a computer; and 49 minutes playing video games. In many cases, youths are engaged in two or more of these activities at the same time. It’s little wonder that this era has become known as the “digital age,” and Americans born after 1980 have become known as “digital natives.” The ubiquity of images in young people’s lives has transformed the way they see, learn and perceive the world around them.<sup>2</sup>

It is very important, with this explosion of visual and digital technology, that programs are offered to strengthen the cul-

tural arts and integrate the arts into other areas of learning to ensure students become knowledgeable and skillful in this new age. For older adults, the same holds true. As a community arts facility, recreation departments should look for ways to think out of the box; share programming and resources; and build partnerships within the business community and other higher-learning institutions. Unlike sports programs, where the environment is highly competitive for participants, the dynamics of an arts center are totally different. Participants are generally from the city/community in which they live and are fewer in number — all ages and skill levels should be encouraged to participate. If allowed, corporate partners can be engaged to help support programs; underwrite scholarships; or host arts shows or other visual presentations, such as a “Hall of Fame” photo exhibit featuring notable personalities who have been involved with the recreation department as an athlete or artist.

In an effort to make American children more competitive on the world stage, many schools have eliminated or greatly reduced access to the cultural arts in favor of science and math. Many leaders, parents and educators are beginning to recognize that these actions are misguided. In today’s digital world, anyone can create something, post it on YouTube and get instant, international feedback — thus allowing us to create “new worlds” and an audience for future works.

Coaches and athletes often use creative means to show their skills on YouTube, Facebook and other social media. This is only one example of how students who engage in the cultural arts can innovate, create and produce works and have access to the world stage at little or no cost. In essence, it is like cross-

training between sports and arts. They can work together to create a more dynamic program.

Studying and supporting the cultural arts help participants learn to value diverse perspectives and cultures — something that is increasingly important in a global society. One of the components to building a successful cultural arts program or sports program is recruiting skilled and experienced art instructors/educators and coaches. Not every person who claims to be “creative” or athletic will turn out to be an effective teacher. It really becomes a juggling act among interaction with the students, parents and the teachers/coaches.

The process of unveiling creativity and coaching a sport is much like peeling an onion. One layer at a time, the process is deconstructed to allow the student to observe, gather relevant information, try out solutions and validate those that are not effective. This step-by-step process allows students to let down their guard to explore freely and experience success on their own. If young people are told by their parents or other influential adults in their lives that they “aren’t creative,” “can’t draw or paint,” “aren’t athletic” or “can’t run or throw,” they will begin to adopt these same negative feelings about many other things and will begin to push away the idea to even try. The old adage “Can’t never could” certainly holds true in this observation.

What do Jamie Williams, Bernie Williams, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, John McEnroe and Jerry Lawler all have in common? They are athletes, artists and collectors, and they are passionate about the cultural arts. The most recent issue of *Champion*, the NCAA publication, featured Dr. Jamie Williams as the

---

“Sports have always allowed me to express my true emotions and competitive nature. I realized photography allows me to combine my passion for sports with a career in photography. In sporting events, simple fundamentals can create the most beautiful and captivating images that can be expressed in simplicity, form, strength and power. The true beauty in sports photography lies in the expression and intensity of the star rather than just the image of the athlete making a good play. Sports is a passion of mine, it has been a pathway to new countries, opportunities, and adventures.”

Nubia Garcia Allen was a member of the Mexican National Basketball Team and graduated from Montana State University in 2009 where she played basketball and majored in photography. The 6’2” star forward transitioned from someone who was uncomfortable in front of the camera to one who is accomplished behind it. In January 2009, the NCAA honored her and several other “artist-athletes” from around the country for their athletic and artistic abilities with a display at the NCAA convention and an article in *Champion* magazine. She is now a professional photographer living in Montana.



Photo courtesy of *Champion* magazine



successful athletic director at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. It was here in August 2005 that Elsa Stephens, Academy president, asked the former Nebraska All-American tight end and Super Bowl champion to build an athletic program from scratch. Williams is in the driver's seat with his foot on the gas, and his passengers are a bunch of artists. He considers these students "warrior-poets" capable of designing wins and winning games. "We are here as a destination for athletes who are artists and who compete at high levels as athletes," says Williams. As an innovative leader, he created the school's slogan: "**Be Artist. Be Athlete.**" The rest is history! (Visit [ncaachampionmagazine.com](http://ncaachampionmagazine.com) for the complete article.)

In 2009, the editors of *Champion* also canvassed numerous colleges for accomplished student-athlete artists. More than 100 quality nominations were received representing diverse media. A dozen students were featured, highlighting their accomplishments in academics, art and athletics. The students featured were from all over the world and played water polo, lacrosse, soccer, football, basketball and volleyball. They also paint, draw, click and sculpt. The most impressive aspect is they all possess the creative spirit, drive and energy that further diversifies the pool that comprises college sports. Their art is an expression of their athletic abilities.<sup>3</sup> "While NCAA student-athletes are accomplished in many fields other than sports, we chose to highlight the creative arts because of the perceived disconnect between such a physical activity — athletics — and the more cerebral creative arts path. We found dozens of accomplished athletes who also excel in painting, design, photography and ceramics, further illustrating how the arts are interwoven into the educational experience," says Gary Brown, editor, *Champion* magazine.

As members of the National Recreation and Parks Association, it is important that we stay focused on advancing resources that will "make parks and recreation indispensable elements of American communities." "As recreation professionals, we should share resources and programs to support and promote each other and the community we serve," says William Weathers, recreation supervisor II, city of Alhambra. "In many ways, the talent and programs in the cultural arts can serve the department positively by teaching staff how to develop their talent and creativity across the board. In addition, team-building classes can be offered to teach staff how to use their digital camera, develop basic drawing skills, create better presentations, how to use publishing or other graphic software as well as painting and mixed media. With this new digital age upon us all, we should be motivated to expand our horizons, reach out of your comfort zone and challenge how to unveil and engage more creativity in all recreation programs in 2012. If we use our resources around us, being creative will allow each of us to connect programs that you probably thought were unconnected." ■

*Nancy Suttles, BFA, is the arts coordinator for the Cultural Arts Division of the city of Alhambra Recreation and Parks Department. Since 2010, she has rebuilt its cultural arts programs to include all*

*discovery-based classes taught by professional art instructors and art educators. The Alhambra Arts Center was the recipient of the 2011 GRPA Dorothy Mullins Arts & Humanities Award, Cultural Affairs Section, for its Teen Drawing and Portfolio Development class, which follows the same course curriculum guidelines as the College Board Advanced Placement Studio Art program. She has more than 30 years of experience as a professional creative director, an arts advocate and a community outreach volunteer.*

### Research Sources

1. Peter Carruthers, Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland
2. National Art Education Association
3. NCAA, *Champion* magazine

Dr. Jamie Williams is the first director of athletics at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, the largest and most renowned private art university in the country. Dr. Williams is a graduate of the University of Nebraska, where he was an All-American and an All-Big Eight Conference football player, earning an undergraduate degree in broadcast journalism. He continued his education by completing a masters of science in mass communication from San Jose State University and receiving a doctorate of education in organization and leadership from the University of San Francisco. Dr. Williams' philosophy on developing the athletic program is based on the three As: Academics, the feeder of intellect and wisdom; Arts, the emancipator of spirit and expression; and Athletics, the builder of physicality and courage. Professionally, Dr. Williams played 12 years in the National Football League as a tight-end for the San Francisco 49ers, the Houston Oilers and the Los Angeles Raiders. He won a Super Bowl Championship in 1990 with the San Francisco 49ers. After working with Oscar award-winning Director Oliver Stone to create the motion picture, *Any Given Sunday*, Dr. Williams started his production company, YMotion Media, which is focused on original sports content. Dr. Williams is a firm believer in arts and athletics coexisting like the "warrior-poet" of yesteryear. He plans for the Academy to make an immediate impact on the world of collegiate athletics. In just under four years, Dr. Williams has molded the Academy of Art University's Athletic Department into a model program that has grown from no athletics to sponsoring 14 intercollegiate NCAA Division II sports. As the program's student-athletes compete successfully in the classroom and devote charitable time with the community, Dr. Williams is on his way to taking the historic Academy of Art University to a whole new level.



Source: Academy of Art University. Photo courtesy of *Champion* magazine

## A Few Interesting Cultural Arts Facts

- Approximately 1.25 million Americans work in the visual arts
- One in 111 jobs is in art and design
- **The economic impact of art and design exceeds that of sports worldwide**
- The creative industries are an estimated \$30 billion export annually
- Jobs in design have increased 43 percent in the past 10 years
- Yearly sales of art reach an estimated \$10 billion in the United States alone
- There are more than 532,000 designers working in the United States
- More people are employed in the visual arts than in all of the performing arts and sports industries combined
- Approximately 200,000 people are employed in the film industry
- People spend approximately \$55 billion annually on video games
- The computer-animation industry generates \$33 billion annually
- Jobs and employment in many creative industries are growing faster than the labor force as a whole and make up 30 percent of the workforce by some estimates
- America's nonprofit arts industry generates \$134 billion in economic activity every year
- By 2016, jobs for artists and designers are predicted to increase by 42 percent
- Arts-related businesses in the country's largest cities represent 4.3 percent of all businesses and 2.2 percent of all jobs in the United States
- There are 3 million people working for more than 600,000 arts-centric businesses in the United States
- Employment growth by arts-centric businesses since 2007 was 12 percent, more than four times the rise in the total number of U.S. employees
- Designers are the single largest group of artists, followed by performing artists such as actors, dancers, musicians and announcers
- Employment of interior designers is expected to grow 19 percent from 2006 to 2016
- Wage and salary employment in the motion picture and video industries is projected to grow 11 percent by 2016
- Animators, film and video editors, and others skilled in digital filming and computer-generated imaging have the best job prospects in future of the motion-picture and video industries
- There are about 94,000 computer artists and animators working in the United States
- Jobs for photographers have increased 38 percent in the past four years

Source: Ringling School of Art and Design

# Serving Your BUSINESS of RECREATION

Across our different product lines there are hundreds of variations offering you choices in style, size, features, materials, and colors. We design and manufacture them ourselves ... commercial quality products able to withstand years of use and exposure.



Park Benches and Athletic Benches



Mail and Streetscape Tables



Standard and Accessible Park Tables, Kids Tables



Campfire Rings



Ash, Trash, and Recycling Receptacles and Lids



Bike Racks



Charcoal Grills

The Pilot Rock brand is your best choice for park, street, and camp site furnishings.

**Pilot Rock**

Serving the Business of Recreation  
Since 1959 with  
**PARK • STREET • CAMP  
SITE PRODUCTS**

**RJThomas Mfg. Co., Inc.**

PO Box 946, Cherokee, IA 51012-0946

Ph: 800-762-5002 • Fax: 712-225-5796

E-Mail: [pilotrock@rjthomas.com](mailto:pilotrock@rjthomas.com)

Web: [www.pilotrock.com](http://www.pilotrock.com)