

# AmeriCorps at Baltimore Clayworks



*Sarah McCann and Laura Cohen reveal the benefits of an arts collaboration*

*Cups created in a Cup-a-thon workshop.*

**M**AKING ART WITH COMMUNITY CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS and community members to develop voice and to overcome assumptions and intolerances through shared art-making experiences. As they build with clay, they synonymously build new relationships and new perceptions.

Since 2004 Baltimore Clayworks has partnered with the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and AmeriCorps to host a Community Artist in Residence to work on site and in community. The Community Art Collaborative (CAC) is an AmeriCorps State program that links together artists, communities, non-profits and institutions of higher education to create projects and programs that use art as a vehicle to initiate community change. AmeriCorps artists at Baltimore Clayworks receive hands-on experience in multiple aspects of ceramics based community arts programming while also benefitting from the connection to MICA, an institution dedicated to the education of professional artists and designers.

Dominique Hellgeth, Clayworks' most recent CAC member completed two consecutive terms of service, "The best part of being an AmeriCorps member at Clayworks was working with the participants at our community sites, creating things out of clay and sharing stories," says Hellgeth, "During these last two years, I have learnt how to teach and create projects with community. Seeing the excitement and success in my students, learning how to work with large groups of people and collaborating with others on projects were all powerful experiences."

Hellgeth began her time with Clayworks assisting community artists in the classroom with ceramics programs for youth, senior adults, families and adults in addiction recovery. Baltimore Clayworks is nationally recognised for its model of establishing Clay for All!, satellite studios in partnership with grass roots organisations located in the

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neighbourhoods that they serve. These partnerships allow Clayworks to create sustainable programs in under-resourced communities where people have little or no access to the arts, which carries out the Clayworks' value that art making is a right rather than a privilege.

Clayworks' AmeriCorps members take on many teaching and administrative roles, from managing a Clay for All! satellite studio, ensuring all materials and equipment are in working order, community organising and teaching clay classes to young people on an ongoing basis. The AmeriCorps program provides complete immersion and job training for novice community artists wanting authentic experience in community. "I benefitted from the mentorship of strong and powerful people that I worked with, from the staff at Clayworks to the students in my classes," explains Hellgeth, "It has been an excellent place to grow professionally and personally." In her two years of service Hellgeth grew from assisting an instructor to teaching classes on her own at partner site Jubilee Arts and other contract sites in schools, community organisations and recreation centres. As she found her voice in the classroom, Hellgeth was able to develop her own artistic practice and foster the creative voice of those she taught.

Hellgeth developed the Cup-A-Thon program, hosting workshops to make cups that support Clayworks' Buy a Cup, Give a Class initiative. This project was a startup concept created by Jillian Branch, our 2010–2011 CAC member. Cups produced and donated by artists to the Community Arts program are priced at 10 to 20 dollars and 100 percent of the proceeds go towards clay programming at our Clay for All! satellite studios. Cup-A-Thon events now happen on a regular basis because of Hellgeth's ambition. This program not only raises funds, but also helps develop awareness of Clayworks' community program and brings artists and students together to build relationships and create cups that support the satellite studios. This ensures that the many benefits from high quality ceramic arts programming are affordable and accessible to all people, regardless of income, age, gender, ethnicity, race or ability. Cup-A-Thon events provide individuals the opportunity to give back to the community through a hands-on ceramics experience.

Baltimore Clayworks knows the importance of on-the-job training for adults



Top left: Cup-a-thon.  
 Top right: Students from Mother Seton Academy, a contract site. Class led by Dominique Hellgeth.  
 Above: Buy a Cup, Give a Class initiative.



*Top left: A handbuilt cup created during a Cup-a-thon. Photo by Kevin C Brown. Top right: Co-Director of Community Arts, Laura Cohen, served as an AmeriCorps member in 2008-2009. Above: 2010-2011 AmeriCorps member Sarah Blosser instructing a student at a Clay for All! satellite studio.*

looking for hands-on experience and teaching skills. Those who are committed to working with people of all backgrounds in the creative arts flourish in this program. The AmeriCorps program allows Clayworks to train an individual and reciprocally benefit from the 1700 hours of work the member puts in each year. Both the AmeriCorps Community Art Collaborative program and ceramic arts programming of Baltimore Clayworks provide unique opportunities for novice community artists to develop their teaching, grant writing, organising, art making and curating in real-life capacities. This experiential training model also allows the CAC members to learn about the community, teaching and lesson planning while simultaneously developing their roles and responsibilities as community artists.

As her final project with Baltimore Clayworks, Hellgeth worked on a public art project, a mosaic that will be installed on the façade of the Harris-Marcus Center where Jubilee Arts, one of our Clay for All! centres is located. This mural was a collaboration among the five clay classes at Jubilee Arts. Hellgeth facilitated young people, seniors, families and other instructors to create the community designed and executed mosaic mural that embodies and reflects the neighborhood's history and future. This collaborative effort exemplifies what community members are capable of when they have access to arts and resources. It also illustrates how artists and community are able to create work that not only has visible effect and a positive message, but also provides a creative outlet for youth and adults to share their stories, develop skills and build confidence.

Baltimore Clayworks' AmeriCorps term ends with an exhibition in our Community Arts Gallery. The AmeriCorps member has the freedom to display any medium of art. Sarah Blosser, our 2010-2011 AmeriCorps resident, installed fabric sculptures consisting of trees and vines. This year, Dominique Hellgeth chose to showcase ceramic cups, bowls, functional ware and mosaics that she created in collaboration with the community.

Many of Clayworks' AmeriCorps members have gone on to continue careers in community arts. Our 2009–2010 AmeriCorps member, Ariel Plantz, is the Community Arts Director at the Clay Arts Center in Port Chester, New York, US. "The AmeriCorps program gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the field," says Plantz. "I learnt a great deal about community arts and ceramics, experiencing all levels of the job – teaching youth and adults, seeing the inner-workings of a non-profit and gaining experience in arts administration. I appreciate service because of my time in AmeriCorps. The Clay Arts Center has a huge volunteer program and I do not think I would have fully grasped how important volunteers are without my AmeriCorps experience." Two former Baltimore Clayworks' AmeriCorps members were hired on as staff after they completed their terms.

As a part of the AmeriCorps program, members have the opportunity to apply to MICA's Master of Fine Arts in Community Arts program. Our 2010–2011 CAC member, Jillian Branch, is a recent graduate of this program. Ken Krafchek, the Graduate Director of the Master of Fine Arts in Community Arts program at MICA, had this to say about the CAC experience at Clayworks, "An organisation such as Baltimore Clayworks that has long term stability and represents the highest artistic standards is a wonderful resource for our students. Clayworks embodies fully the practices and principles of community arts. Being a comprehensive arts organisation is an added advantage and supports the growth of students who serve their residencies at Clayworks."



*Above and inset: AmeriCorps member Dominique Hellgeth cutting backer for mosaics.*

#### ENDNOTES

Baltimore Clayworks is a non-profit ceramics arts centre located in Baltimore, Maryland, US whose mission is to develop, sustain and promote an artist-centred community that provides outstanding artistic, educational and collaborative programs in ceramic arts. Clayworks lives its mission daily through its program areas: artist residencies, exhibitions, ceramic art education and community arts ([www.baltimoreclayworks.org](http://www.baltimoreclayworks.org)).

AmeriCorps is a US national service program that engages thousands of people each year in service to their communities in critical areas such as education, health and conservation ([www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps](http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps)).

The Community Art Collaborative, created in 2004, matches skilled community artists with non-profit organisations, schools, or community centres for an 11 month residency.

Maryland Institute College of Art, founded in 1826, is among the top visual arts colleges in the nation and is recognised as an important cultural resource for the Baltimore/Washington region, sponsoring many public and community-outreach programs-including more than 100 exhibitions by students, faculty and nationally and internationally known artists annually; as well as artists' residencies, film series, lectures, readings and performances ([www.mica.edu](http://www.mica.edu)).

Jubilee Arts is a non-profit community program providing arts classes to the residents of the Sandtown-Winchester, Upton and surrounding neighbourhoods in Baltimore, Maryland. Jubilee Arts is located on Pennsylvania Avenue, an area with a rich history of African-American culture and is helping to bring the arts back to life in their community ([www.jubileeartsbaltimore.org](http://www.jubileeartsbaltimore.org)).

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Laura Cohen is a licensed art educator, earned her Master of Arts in Community Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art and completed two terms of service with AmeriCorps Community Art Corps, the second of which was with Clayworks. She has been facilitating the Community Arts department at Baltimore Clayworks since 2009 as the Community Arts Co-Director ([laura.cohen@baltimoreclayworks.org](mailto:laura.cohen@baltimoreclayworks.org)).