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Teens and Elders Connect through Art-Making in Response to Crisis

In a Zoom room, ten teens have been gathering recently with Carolyn Shadid Lewis, a multimedia artist and filmmaker who records people who have personal and political stories to tell. Their work will reflect our current crisis. Taking place online, those stories and the art they inspire will reflect lives shaped both by the COVID-19 pandemic and by police violence and its public response.

Shadid Lewis' interdisciplinary approach to documentary storytelling incorporates stop-motion animation, surround sound and installation. Her newest body of work, *InterGeneration*, is unfolding through her artist's residency at the Eliot School of Fine & Applied Arts in Jamaica Plain. The Eliot School's annual Artist in Residence brings teens into the process of professional art-making, producing a body of art each year that reflects issues of contemporary concern.

The Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts has just approved the project for a \$20,000 grant. Alison Croney Moses, Eliot School Program Director, says, "We look forward to working with the Arts Endowment to finalize this grant, which helps make this project possible. We are enormously appreciative of the Endowment's support for this and for many other timely cultural projects across the nation." NEA Chair Mary Anne Carter has approved more than \$84 million in grants as part of its second major funding announcement for the year. This is one of over 1,000 grants approved in this category.

Ms. Carter said, "We celebrate organizations like the Eliot School for providing opportunities for learning and engagement through the arts in these times."

InterGeneration was envisioned as a process of dialog and collaborative art-making to bring two generations together—teens on the verge of adulthood and seniors later in life—to explore stories of the past, expectations for the future, and look creatively at our current moment. But when they first planned the project, Shadid Lewis and the teens never expected the current moment to be defined by public crisis.

Students began meeting with Shadid Lewis in April to hone interview and animation skills, using art supplies delivered to their homes across Boston. Combining methods old and new, they are now in the process of exchanging experiences with elders, including interviews, old-fashioned letter writing and drawing exchanges. Shadid Lewis explains, "Social distancing and isolation heighten the need for cross-generation connection, and we will continue our investigation of our changing neighborhoods with the deeper question of 'What makes our community healthy?'"

In July and August, Shadid Lewis and the teens will produce a video animation in an intensive art-making period. While they hope to eventually meet in person, they are prepared to accomplish this project from their separate homes, connected online.

Shadid Lewis shares, “Coronavirus exposes our interconnection—and the injustices in our economic and social structures. How can we create a community where ALL of our neighbors are remembered and respected in our social fabric? How can we envision a healthy community that sustains and supports each person, giving them the potential to thrive?” Through the personal narratives and outlooks of this small group of elders and teens in Boston, the project seeks threads of a common story.

In *InterGeneration*, Shadid Lewis sees an opportunity to process and heal some of the trauma that both elders and teens are experiencing. In its completion, the final video animation will be a tool for processing and healing for the larger Boston community.

The Eliot School’s Artist in Residence and Teen Bridge programs are proudly supported by *EdVestors, the Joe Kalt & Judy Gans Family Foundation, the Linde Family Foundation, New World Foundation and the Plymouth Rock Foundation.*

Images available upon request.

About Carolyn Shadid Lewis

Carolyn Shadid Lewis is an award-winning multimedia artist and filmmaker whose oral history work examines the lingering effects of public and private trauma on individuals, families and nations. Through stop-motion animation, surround-sound, original music and installation, her lyrical documentary productions take the viewer on imaginative journeys through storytellers’ memories. Shadid Lewis takes a generational view of time, stemming from her Irish and Lebanese ancestry and her own experiences of growing up and working on American military bases during the height of the two Iraq Wars. Shadid Lewis mines individual and collective memories, uncovering their far-reaching implications for our present political life together.

Shadid Lewis’ debut film, *From Twilight til Dawn*, is a personal animated documentary of her family’s military history across three generations. Screened at film festivals and museums nationally, the film won the award for best documentary at the 2015 Glovebox Short Film and Animation Festival in Boston. *Seams*, her animated film-in-progress about Irish and Northern Irish women’s labor during the Second World War, is part of the Women Make Movies Production Assistance Program and has won the support of the Irish Arts Council, the Cork County Council and Mass Humanities Council.

Shadid Lewis turned her lens to the intimate trauma of domestic violence and the Irish legal system that enabled it in her short live-action documentary, *Mary’s Tree*, a story of violence and loss, but also one of beauty and survival. Shadid Lewis is also working to create an advocacy and educational accompaniment to the film. She is partnering with crisis centers in Boston and Ireland, as well as with legal experts and psychologists to create crisis center fundraising initiatives and panel discussions regarding the role legal systems play in perpetuating or preventing domestic violence.

Shadid Lewis holds a BA in piano performance and visual art from William Jewell College in Liberty, MO and an MFA from the Studio for Interrelated Media at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She lives in Boston with her husband and daughter.

About the Eliot School of Fine & Applied Arts

The Eliot School inspires lifelong learning in craftsmanship and creativity for all. It sends artists and artisans to teach visual arts and woodworking to young people in schools and community centers throughout Boston, and offers classes for all ages in its two Jamaica Plain locations. Artisans' talks, an annual artist's residency, a multi-year teen program and family events round out its programs. For more information, visit eliotschool.org or follow @eliotschool on Twitter and Facebook.

Photo credit: Carolyn Shadid Lewis

