
Event Reviews

**#510: *If the Shoe Fits...A
Transformative Laboratory
Exhibition.***
**Betty Rymer Gallery, School
of the Art Institute of Chicago,
March 10-April 14, 2006.**

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*Betty Rymer Gallery, Chicago,
USA*

A living work of art is life itself, born from the dynamic fusion of the self (the microcosm) and the universe (the macrocosm)... If we accept...the interconnection of all living things, then art becomes the elemental modality through which humans discover their bonds with humans, humanity with nature, and humanity with the universe.

-Daisaku Ikeda, *Creative life at Académie des Beaux-Arts*, June 14, 1989.

#510: *If the Shoe Fits...* (<http://www.artic.edu/webspaces/510iftheshoefits/>) as hosted by the Betty Rymer Gallery at the School of the Art Institute (SAIC) of Chicago March 10-April 14, 2006, was developed over the course of two years, plaiting the power of the oldest transformative folktale (Dundes 1982; Sierra 1992; Warner 1994) with a transformative experience for students around the globe. Taking folk tale AT 510A as its guiding subject and theme, the laboratory exhibition examined the widespread interest in this folk tale. International artists provided their critical assessment and/or retelling of the tale type

through drawings, artists' books, sculpture, assemblage, and collaborative murals. Artwork included mentored collaborative student works from Kenya, South Korea, Turkey, Ohio, and Chicago, as well as some produced by pediatric patients working with the Snow City Arts Foundation.

As a laboratory, the exhibition's educational objective was to provide a forum to critically analyze culture and a citizen's place within it. The artwork provided a platform for dialogue that allowed local and distant comparisons of experience and perspective. In presenting works by established artists alongside collaborative student projects, the exhibition's designers intended to challenge the notion of privilege within the gallery's public space. The exhibition sought to construct a democratic landscape where the cultivation and exchange of individual perspectives could be effectively achieved. In this regard, the exhibition represented a critical intervention in the art world trend toward privileging a single point of view.

Case studies and focus groups conducted among school-aged children provided data regarding sustained level of interest in the tale, used to speculate on a projected laboratory/exhibition result. International versions of tale type AT 510A provided students an effective interface with which to explore fixed notions of dating rituals, death, patriarchy, family dynamics (including step-and/or mixed families), the complexities of gender expectations, grief, magic, matriarchy, misogyny, privilege/power, psychological/sociological phenomena, sexuality and/or spirituality that are at work within the narrative, as well as the unique perspective each artist used to interpret and present the tale.

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A sampling of the exhibited works by students and artists follows:

Snow City Arts Foundation's (SCAF) artists selected an AT 510A version of interest to them. In response, using medical supplies, they made plaster casts of their own feet and then fit those castings into altered shoes. SCAF visual artist-in-residence Lisa Fedich mentored hospitalized patients, enabling them, although physically confined, to walk in another's shoes. The works produced included Lauren Youins', *In Response to a Persian #510 Tale* (2006) and Ashley Bridges', *In Response to a Louisiana #510 Tale* (2006). In designing the shoes, each participant carefully considered the lifestyle and location of the leading character in the representation he or she chose.

Similarly, under the guidance of Pablo Serrano and Alberto Sepulveda, students of Chicago's Eli Whitney and Rosario Castellanos elementary schools created a lobby mural outside the gallery entrance as a response to AT 510A by investigating cultural artifacts close to home: their family members' castoff shoes. The students developed the mural inscribed with their perspectives by writing slogans across the painted shoes where one might typically find corporate logos such as the *Nike* swoosh. They studied international films and children's book versions of AT 510A to gain a sense of the social implications laced throughout multicultural versions of the tale type in popular culture, and to consider how those themes are expressed in their daily lives. While developing their own interpretations, the students deconstructed well-worn

interpretations, including commercials that use AT 510A to target youth as consumers.

In the same vein, three studio classes at Chicago's Multicultural Arts High School deconstructed the Disney film classic *Cinderella* (Geronimi et al. 1950) and produced a joint installation. Participants in Michelle Corpus' studio examined gender and stereotypes found throughout the animated film, contrasting these to images found in consumer marketing aimed at teens. Robin Roberts led a story-writing studio allowing her students to update Disney's screenplay using different genres told from various perspectives. Tanya Brown Merriman's fashion students altered clothing to design, reenact, and document the story from a hip-hop point of view.

Aaron Knochel's students at the Seoul International School reminded us that at their best, folktales can hint at utopian societies or at least articulate magical strategies with which to improve occupational concerns. Jack Zipes, in his *Happily Ever After: Fairytales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (1997) acknowledged the collective value of tales in his comment that:

We use fairy tales as markers to determine where we are in our journey. The fairy tale becomes a broad arena for presenting and representing our wishes and desires. It frequently takes the form of a mammoth discourse in which way we carry on struggles over family, sexuality, gender roles, rituals, values, and sociopolitical power. (Zipes 1997, 17)

The individual flash animations and corresponding movie posters made

by Knochel's students did not defer to Disney or any other storyteller. Instead, in the style of Wendy Walker and Jane Yolen's contemporary fairy tales, their interpretations critiqued oppressive forces. The students examined the oppression of homework, the dreaded SAT exams, dating, body image, war, and the struggle to balance all aspects of teen life—issues not easily resolved that readily cross geographical borders. The work of these students explored the potential of the Cinderella tale type to function as a tool of personal transformation that could assist them in dealing with the difficult issues of adolescence.

Likewise, Yesmim Sonmez's tenth grade students of TED Istanbul Koleji collaborated to produce *Turkish Cinderella* (2006), a unique story about a poor village girl's personal and economic transformation. The girl, Ece, is forced to move to Istanbul after her mother's death. In the city she befriends Tan, a paralyzed youth who suffered at the hands of his evil mother. Using AT 510A motifs, the story chronicles Ece's transformation as she overcomes the obstacles of servitude to become a successful physician. By the end, Ece marries and treats Tan; the evil mother's heart is softened; and all live happily ever after. Their piece was presented onto the page as well as into audio recordings in both Turkish and English.

Students from Kenya pointed to the cultural contingencies of the folktale by attempting to rearticulate elements of the narrative in terms of familiar, but different, Kenyan folk motifs. Students from Kenya High School, the national

high school for young women, under the direction of art teacher Genevieve K'opiyo, collaboratively produced the gallery mural *Lwande Magera*, a local legend that depicts the indigenous teachings of the Sodho clan of Kano (2006). Individual drawings made by students mentored at The Nairobi Boys School by art teacher Wanjiku Ng'ang'a translated the essence of a benevolent "fairy godmother" into ancestral spirits. Such illustrations include Edwin Kaseda's *The Walk Towards Help* (2006), Peter Njeru's *Terrified Cinderella*, and Dissent Ingati's *The Dance* (2006).

Extending this critique to a global scale, other pieces pointed out that mass marketing calls attention to some versions of folktales more than to others. The versions variously produced by Disney and the Grimm brothers continue to influence the public at large. An assemblage of individual artists drawn from various geographic locations and cultural heritages—Damla Tokcan-Faro (Turkey), Lucia Fabio (Italy), and Zsófia Ötvös (Hungary) — illustrated the impact of branded AT 510A characters. The artwork of Tokcan-Faro's *The ingredients for a life lived happily ever after, with Turkish to English translation* (2006) and Fabio's *Cenerentola* (2006) reflected a childhood association with the innocuous fantasy of Disney, while the series of paintings by Ötvös, *Trying on the Shoe* (2006), included the mutilation of the stepsisters at the hands of their mother as graphically depicted by the brothers Grimm (Dundes, ed. 1982, 28). Turkey, Italy, and Hungary each claim a rich domestic canon of AT 510A variants, yet each of the three

artists found themselves influenced as children by the longstanding marketing wizardry of the more popular versions and demonstrated the effects of this influence in their works.

Picking up on this thread, Eileen Maxson's video *Three Revised Fairytales* confronted and challenged the widely disseminated Disney representation of the Prince as a hero and Cinderella as a trifling girl. Overlaying imagery from Disney's film with audio from the TV show *90210*, the work exposed the Prince as a weak link in the story and Cinderella as a strong person who has suffered, survived, and transformed into a perceptive judge of character, a woman who can smell a rat in royal garb. To the extent that it sought to subvert a mass media fantasy in fairy tale form, Maxson's version realized the visionary musings of Angela Carter on the potentials of technology in the production of narrative. Carter observed that "[n]ow we have machines to do our dreaming for us. But within that 'video gadgetry' might lie the source of a continuation, even a transformation, of storytelling and story performance" (Carter 1990, xxi).

Other works in the exhibition commented on the historical process of how AT 510A was introduced to the public through print media. Chapbooks such as Pamela Barrie's Scottish AT 510A letterpress variant *The Ballad of Rashin Coatie* (2005-2006), showed examples of the initial mass-mediated treatment of fairy tales. Chapbooks eventually served as public curriculum, teaching the public how to behave according to the principals of well-positioned clergy

and judiciary. In 1942, the introduction of *Little Golden Books* challenged the privileged-status of literature in the United States. At twenty-five cents each, children's literature was made accessible to most by expanding print distribution to include sales in department stores. Amanda W. Freymann's work *Cinderella: A Fairy Tale from the 1950's* (2006), an altered Little Golden Book, used Cinderella to parody the sensibilities of American women in the 1950's.

Many of the works displayed in *#510: If the Shoe Fits...* also celebrated collaborative practice. Marshall Field's treatment of *Cinderella* in the design of their Chicago department store's 2005 holiday window display, inspired by the illustrations of Diana Marye Huff, was developed through a partnership with New York's Spaeth Design. The collaborative effort demonstrated the success of storytelling as a lure to bring customers into the store. Huff's original interpretation in the artist book *Cinderella the True Story* (2004), focuses on a young female protagonist who has aspirations to become a fashion designer. In the end, she marries the prince who finances her dream to own a fashion boutique. The shop eventually becomes a beloved store similar to Marshall Field's. Huff's sketches and Spaeth Design's foam core prototypes for *The Prince and Cinderella had a fairy-tale wedding and lived happily ever after* (2005), Tulle & Dye's *Cinderella Slipper* (2005), and Spaeth's *Cinderella – Wedding* (2005) represent the eighteen-month collaborative process and the numerous design teams behind the seasonal display.

The assertion that rather than teaching children about fine art, *art can educate children about the world,*

arises from the observation that when children's introductions often constitutes an intellectual exercise in status perception. In the art world, a work appraised at a certain monetary value is often assessed as being of higher value than works by self-taught artists or by folk artists. Frequently, pedagogical value is assigned only to celebrated visual art, in the same way that works by authors of distinction become canonical on teaching syllabi. As a result, the art product (text or visual) is too often valued over the artistic process.

In a child's experience of art, the business of the "art world" is irrelevant, but the process of discovery and imagination enables crucial developmental tasks. Great masters need not shoulder exclusive responsibility for developing aesthetic awareness in students. Children can discover shape, color, and the intent and execution of design in the images with which they interact in their daily lives. Students are flooded with text-based media that is ripe for investigation of content, style, and structure. Utilizing folktales, visual and text-based artworks as a medium of exchange has proven to be of value in discovering and sharing authentic cultural distinctions among students of all ages. What is more, the evolution of oral tales and print media, as folklorists have often noted, is interwoven with notions of social justice. Therefore folktales represent a powerful genre for teachers of all subjects to use in opening an accessible route to cultural awareness and criticism for their students.

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Playing Folklorists Online: Teaching about Folk Art through Interactivity

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Abstract

This review concerns an online game designed to teach elementary school students about the artists on Folkvine.org, an interactive website about Florida folk artists. In the review I look at the way that the game allows players to play the role of folklorists involved in public programming by intentionally foregrounding the research and public programming encounters within the structure of the game. The objective of the game is to successfully plan a Folkvine public event at which the artists' website is premiered to members of the public. The "chance" cards in the game are kernel narratives about the experience of doing public arts programming, answering the "task" cards mimics the ethnographic encounter of doing field research and learning about artists, and the "junction" cards imitate the brainstorming about the titles/themes of artists' sites. The project is intentionally playful in more senses than one, and imitates the public programming/fieldwork work folklorists do in sharing community-based arts.

The Folkvine project (www.folkvine.org) is an effort to utilize new media to share the stories of Florida folk artists and their communities on the internet. Through the use of digital media, the project seeks ways to present and, most importantly, experience their art and culture as well. This form of online ethnographic storytelling provides an arena for enacting the research process in a way that moves

beyond text-based presentation. The design and navigation structures of the websites on folkvine.org seek to simultaneously present the context for understanding cultural stories and the experience of ethnography and ethnology (method and interpretation). By creatively exploiting the characteristics of digital environments, folkvine.org reflects the narrative and reflexive trends in anthropology and folkloristics (Pink 2001; Van Maanen 1988).

The Folkvine elementary school game is an online board game created with through the joint efforts of the University of Central Florida and the Florida Department of State Division of Cultural Affairs. Elementary school students at Sterling Creek Elementary in Orlando, Florida, created brightly colored artwork for the game, based on the artwork of Folkvine artists Lilly Carrasquillo, Ruby C. Williams, and Kurt Zimmerman. The game board consists of seventeen spaces for "task" questions about individual artists, as well as several "junction" spots (addressing key themes and requiring a detour if they are answered incorrectly) and "chance" spots (relating to unforeseen events and circumstances surrounding the Folkvine public events). Although there are three main game boards focusing on three artists, the questions involve, to some degree, all of the seven artists featured in the first two years of the Folkvine site (including Taft Richardson, Ginger LaVoie, Wayne and Marty Scott, and Diamond Jim Parker).

The player joins the Folkvine team as an event planner in-training, and must complete several steps along the way. First, the player mixes and matches a bobblehead avatar from various parts and color options. The player then chooses an artist from a splash page. When the user picks an artist, he/she is taken

to the game board for that particular artist. The game board reflects the art and life of the artist. For example, Lilly Carrasquillo's board has drawings of *coquis* (a type of frog common to Puerto Rico and the figure which she first sold when she became an artist) and Mexican sun masks (a form of art she creates).

Then the player can begin the game. There are three types of cards on the board. The "task" cards send the player to the artist's site to answer questions about the artist; question topics generally concern the motivations behind, uses of, and history of various artistic practices. Solutions to these questions take the form of a multiple choice answer and a freeform response which expands on the multiple choice answer. The "junction" cards are in play at two main points in the game. These cards require players to name the theme or overarching metaphor that structured the creation of the artist's site and provides the rationale for the public program's title—information that can be inferred from an exploration of the site. Players are evaluated on the basis of these answers; if players provide poor responses to these fundamental questions, they are sent off on a detour lined with more task card spots so they may learn more about the artist. Finally, when players land on certain spaces, "chance" cards are drawn. These cards represent challenges or opportunities for the folk art event planner. "Chance" cards have to do with the public event at which the artist's website is presented to the community. They address questions about the date, time, and place of event, as well as questions relating to refreshments and the presentation schedule. Answers are scored "really good," "acceptable" or "poor," and the player receives a different number of points based on his or her response to the "chance" card.

As an event planner in-training, the Folkvine elementary game player balances learning about the artist with considerations of how to present that artist to the public. After all, an understanding of traditional arts cannot be usefully separated from the folklorist's encounter with the forces of the real world that influence the public presentation of this art.

"Task" Cards: Imitating The Ethnographic Encounter

Sarah Pink notes that:

...working with hypermedia we can make multi-layered audio visual reflexive representations of anthropological research that allow students to 'look behind the text' (both written and visually) to fieldwork experiences...By combining visual and written texts and printed and electronic media we can come closer to representing and learning in a way that draws theory and experience together."
(2004, 218, 220)

The Folkvine game enables this drawing together of "theory and experience" that Pink cites by bringing students "behind the scenes" to explore Folkvine.org in search of answers to relevant art- and culture-based questions raised in the ethnographic encounter. Like the ethnographic fieldwork on which the project is based and which the game mimics, "task" card topics deal with biographical issues, themes or topics in art, inspiration, cultural and geographical context, materials and processes in art, stories behind pieces of art, and so on. Questions for the Puerto Rican artist Lilly Carrasquillo's game, for example, concern definitions of traditions and art ("What is a *vejigante* mask?"), functions ("When are *vejigante* masks traditionally

worn?”), changes to the tradition (“How has Lilly changed the tradition when she made her own *ofrenda*?”), themes in the art and values of the artist (“What does Lilly say is the most precious thing in the world? Answer: the sun”), and inspiration (“What kind of art has Lilly made inspired by the Taino Indians?”). These questions delve into a variety of topics relevant to the understanding of an artist’s work and life.

“Junction” Cards: Imitating The Brainstorming Process

“Junction” cards result in the player advancing or being blocked in the progression of the game. These cards parallel the work of the folklorist who, in planning community events, seeks to adequately interpret the folklore being presented to an artist. For example, again from Lilly Carrasquillo’s game, “junction” questions revolved around appropriate titles for her public event, and major influences on her art. In the case of Lilly Carrasquillo’s public event, for instance, the Folkvine team hopes students will grasp that she is an artist who draws inspiration from a variety of cultures to teach and share art. Students are encouraged to intuit this theme through the exploration of her site and its construction. If students answer these key questions incorrectly, however, they are sent back to answer more “task” cards before being permitted to try again.

The “junction” questions serve as reminders of the folklorist’s job as advocate for the artistic expression of traditional cultures and artists, expressions that elite culture and the mainstream media frequently overlook. As advocates in-training, players of the Folkvine game enact the public acknowledgement of folk art in the public sphere (Russell 2006).

“Chance” Cards: Kernel Narratives About Public Arts Programming Experiences

As folklorists involved in public programming know, unforeseen events can impact the programs in ways that make for entertaining anecdotes, but not usually for scholarly material. The “chance” cards attempt to deconstruct just that idea. For example, a “chance” card from Lilly Carrasquillo’s game reads:

A well known restaurant owner finds out about Lilly’s event. She calls you and offers to write you a \$200 check to help support your project. Do you:

a)take the money and use it for a celebration party after the event is over?

b)thank them but tell them you really need \$500 because \$200 isn’t enough?

c)thank the donor, use the money on the event, and write them a thank you note?

Other topics include publicity for the event, equipment malfunctions, or issues of language.

Questions such as these have their basis in real life experiences of the Folkvine team in planning public events. Several examples will suffice to illustrate. At an event for Ruby C. Williams, the Folkvine team found the community center locked upon arrival and the office closed. Incorrect directions had been printed on the invitations. Pope John Paul II died the day of Lilly Carrasquillo’s event at the Puerto Rican Association in Orlando (a large proportion of whose membership was Roman Catholic). The city of Tampa and the University of Central Florida could not come to an agreement

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on a bomb threat clause in the community center contract for Taft Richardson's event; as a result, the Folkvine team was forced to host an event for over 100 people without the requisite insurance. These circumstances formed the basis for "chance" questions in the game.

Brian Moeran argues:

As an anthropologist, how I record talk and accompanying stories also reflects my own craft of telling stories...In other words, the writing of stories is itself a story of writing, in which, as author, I choose to select certain themes, on the basis of perceived relevance and importance, and ignore others. (2007, 161).

Similarly, Linda Finlay argues that reflexive stories: "open a window on areas that in other research contexts would remain concealed from awareness...[and aim] to expose researcher silences" (2002, 541). With Moeran and Finlay, the Folkvine team members decided that instead of occluding issues of public presentation from the public record, they would draw upon actual experiences, using pseudonyms and other techniques to guard privacy in situations that might be sensitive. Occurrences such as those outlined above are part of the politics of planning an event. Exposing students not only to the cultural context of art but also to the socio-political context of public arts programming provides students with a grounded, holistic view of arts facilitators and artists as members of a complex social network.

Summation

Timothy Taylor (2002) and Adam Chapman (2004) view digital technology as inherently social. Digital media may in fact lead to fur-

ther social isolation in certain cases, but it can also be used to effectively imitate social processes in ways that draw young people into an appreciation of the culture around them. The Folkvine elementary game employs strategies like imitating the research and public folklore presentation process as part of the structure of the game. Rather than leaving this information on fieldwork and public arts work outside the educational game itself (and relegating it to anecdotes to be shared orally or in written form with colleagues only), the Folkvine team has incorporated it into the logic of the game and of the educational experience. Playing the game, then, requires young players visit the artists' websites to research answers to important questions about the art, give appropriate responses to chance events that are inspired by real experiences of the Folkvine team, and identify the key ideas that express the main themes of the artists' work and worldview. Players of the game thus become public sector folklorists in-training and, through this interactive experience, come to understand important lessons about art in its cultural context.

Note

The Folkvine Team consisted of an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students at the University of Central Florida. The Folkvine project was funded for three years by the Florida Humanities Council. The curriculum project this review addresses was funded by the Florida Department of State Division of Cultural Affairs and directed by Kristin Congdon and Natalie Underberg. Chantale Fontaine and Nathan Draluck created the programming for the game, and Lynn Tomlinson provided art direction expertise.

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