

YARNBOMBING LA WORKSHOP

Introductory notes

Public art can take many forms. Most people think of public art as a bronze sculpture in a park, but public art can actually take the form of murals, street art, temporary sculptures, and performances. Yarn bombing is a form of public art in which the fiber arts - knitting, crochet, applique, and more - are used to cover environmental elements such as bike racks and benches to make a colorful statement. Yarn bombing is often done guerilla style without the permission of city officials, placing it in the family of street art and graffiti. However, unlike graffiti and tagging, yarn bombing generally carries an innocuous message and is easy to clean up - all it takes is a pair of scissors to remove the piece of art.

Why make public art at all? This is one of the questions that we will be exploring through our workshops by engaging in different types of public yarn bombing. Public art brings out and tells stories about communities and places through a visual process. By thinking about how a place visually looks, students will also engage in thinking about the social and historical meaning of place. Guerilla public art such as yarn bombing allows for anyone to artistically express themselves in public.

This workshop is written by Carol Zou, “head poncho” of Yarn Bombing Los Angeles (YBLA). YBLA is a fiber arts community that collaborates with city governments, museums, alternative art spaces, and public spaces to create thought-provoking, community-generated public art installations. YBLA's work blends and reinterprets different artistic genres of street art, public art, fiber art, social practice, craft, and high art. YBLA's mission is to create a form of community-generated, site-specific public art that is tactile and accessible, while at the same time initiating dialogue about cross-generation connections and craft history.

Material needs

This workshop requires an instructor who is comfortable with the basic mechanics of hand sewing.

Sourcing sweaters for yarn bombing

All of the projects in these workshops will not be knit or crocheted by hand. Rather, they will involve cutting out shapes from repurposed sweaters and sewing them together with yarn and tapestry needles. Sweaters can be sourced from thrift stores such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army. For maximum visual impact, we suggest brightly colored sweaters in a solid color or a simple pattern such as stripes. The larger the sweater, the more surface area there is for cutting material.

To make it easier to cut out shapes from sweaters, you can take apart the sweaters by cutting them at the seams so that you have pieces that will lie flat. This is especially helpful for sleeves, which are narrow and oddly shaped.

Sewing techniques

-Students will need to learn how to thread a needle and tie a square knot to begin and end their stitches.

-All yarn bombing pieces can be sewn together with the use of the whip stitch (overhand stitch). Whip stitch reference: <http://www.holiday-crafts-and-creations.com/whip-stitch.html>

-Additional stitches that might be helpful would be the running stitch (used to sew pieces together) and the blanket stitch (used to create a nice 'edge' along pieces of applique). Running stitch reference: <http://www.holiday-crafts-and-creations.com/running-stitch.html> Blanket stitch reference: <http://www.holiday-crafts-and-creations.com/how-to-do-blanket-stitch.html>

"Whose Public? Spatializing Politics Through Street Art"

One day workshop (2 hours)

Materials:

Pens
Notepads
Scissors
Recycled Sweaters
Tapestry needles
Yarn
Fabric paint
Felt
Buttons
Beads

Icebreaker: 25 minutes:

The purpose of the icebreaker is to get students to start thinking about their own relationship to public art and street art, especially if they do not live in a very urban location. Students will begin to dissect visual and social components of space, which will then assist them in the yarn bombing exercise.

Students break out into paired groups and discuss one of the following topics for 10 minutes. The group then spends 15 minutes presenting the results of their installation.

- 1) What type of street art do they see in their neighborhood?
- 2) What kind of people make street art? What kind of people enjoy street art?
- 3) What messages do street art send? What is the effect of street art on neighborhoods?
- 4) Is street art vandalism? Is graffiti street art? What is the reaction of authorities to graffiti?

Location scouting: 20 minutes

Students will travel to nearby location to be yarnbombed. They will take measurements of pieces that they want to yarnbomb. Students will measure at least three different pieces and make a sketch of the pieces so that they have options. Students should aim for a yarnbomb that is no larger than 2 ft x 2 ft. Students can team up to cover larger pieces such as a bench, etc.

Location debrief: 15 minutes

- What has the student selected to yarnbomb?
- How does the object the student has selected currently function in the space?
- How will yarnbombing the object change the space?

Yarn bomb making: 40 minutes

-Using recycled sweaters, student will cut out and piece together a yarnbomb according to the measurements that they have taken. They also have the option to decorate their yarnbomb using fabric paint markers, felt, buttons, and beads.

Yarn bomb installation: 10 minutes

- Students will sew their pieces onto the object that they have selected.
- Other students will assist in documenting the workshop through their smartphones or cameras. Photos from the yarnbombing can be uploaded to a digital album or shared online through a hashtag. We recommend a hashtag with the structure #yarnbomb[location] i.e. #yarnbombpacoima or #yarnbombLAHS

Reflection: 10 minutes

Students will come back together to reflect on their yarn bombing. Some potential conversation starters would be:

- How did yarn bombing transform the selected site?
- How did the students feel while yarn bombing?
- What did the students learn about public art?
- How has the students' perspectives on public art and

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5 day workshop (1 hour workshop days)

“Creating a Collaborative Mural”

Note: This workshop involves the creation of a site specific mural. The workshop leader will need to secure permissions and installation logistics for the mural ahead of time. The suggested size for the mural is 2-3 ft by 5-6 ft.

Note 2: The mural topic is derived from interviews with a community. Ideally the workshop leader will secure a partner organization, or choose a location or event at which there is high traffic for conducting interviews.

Note 3: This workshop is geared more towards instructors with a visual arts background, or instructors who have experience in design and compositing murals.

Materials:

Pens
Notepads
Markers
Butcher paper
Scissors
Recycled Sweaters
Tapestry needles
Yarn
Fabric paint
Felt
Buttons
Beads

Day 1: Idea generation

Icebreaker: 20 minutes

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Interview questions: 20 minutes

In pairs or alone, students will come up with interview questions for the community for which they will create a fiber arts mural. That community can be a specific partner organization, such as a home for the elderly, or it can be the general community of passer-bys in the location of the mural. Prompts for question generation are:

- How do you get someone to tell you their story?
- How do you get someone to relate their story to the community or politics as a whole?
- What kind of questions would generate a visual answer?

Sample questions on the theme of “Building Healthy Lifestyles”

- What do you do to maintain a healthy lifestyle?
- What makes it easy/hard to be healthy?
- What are community resources that help you be healthy?
- What is your vision for a healthy community?

Interview questions debrief: 10 minutes

Students will review their questions. They will choose and refine the questions that will be asked during the interview process.

Practice interviews: 10 minutes

Students will practice asking each other the questions that have been chosen for the interview. They will practice engaging the interviewee, asking open ended questions and asking follow up questions.

Day 2: Community interviews

Interviews: 45 minutes

Students will conduct their interviews, either with the chosen community that they are paired with, or with passer-bys in the location that has been chosen for the site-specific mural.

Interview debrief: 15 minutes

Students will report back from their interviews and collectively write down themes and statements that they culled from their interviews.

Day 3: Mural design

Idea generation: 15 minutes

Students will write down and/or sketch out the key themes that they felt were important from the interviews.

Mural Design: 45 minutes

Students will sketch out their final ideas for a mural on a large piece of butcher paper, taking into consideration color, composition, and content. Methods for creating a collective design include:

- Students draw out representations of what they gathered in their interviews. They then cut out parts of their drawings
- Students map out thematically different sections of the mural based on their interviews, and then work in groups to refine the different sections of the mural.
- Students can also trace themselves on butcher paper and use the tracings to represent parts of their interviews.

Day 4: Mural making

The mural design will be cut up into different pieces and each student will be assigned a different piece of the mural. Students will assemble their piece of the mural by sewing together recycled sweaters and embellishing with fabric paint markers, felt, buttons, and beads.

Day 5: Mural making and installation

Finishing mural: 30 minutes

Students will continue working on their piece of the mural. The focus will be on sewing together all the pieces that the students have assembled individually.

Mural installation and celebration: 30 minutes

Students will assist in the installation of the mural. After the mural is up, student will reflect upon the mural's content and the process of making the mural. Students will discuss how the mural visually changes the space, as well as how the process of making the mural affected the relationships between them and the people that they interviewed.

Mural can be documented via photo and video. If there is time after the project, a possibility would be to collect photos of the workshop process, the interviews, and the photos of the finished mural and compile them into a book or a blog.

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5 day Workshop (Alt version)

“Saying it in Public: Urban Letters”

Day 1

Icebreaker - 20 minutes

The purpose of the icebreaker is to get students to start thinking about their own relationship to public art and street art, especially if they do not live in a very urban location. Students will begin to dissect visual and social components of space, which will then assist them in the yarn bombing exercise.

Students break out into paired groups and discuss one of the following topics for 10 minutes. The group then spends 10 minutes presenting the results of their installation.

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Idea generation - 20 minutes

Students are given an image of the site that they will be working on (preferably a site with a chain link fence for hanging the letters). Students are asked to brainstorm ideas of what they would write in the site using large yarn letters. Students are asked to respond to the following prompts:

Relationship between private and public:

- What do people say in public?
- What do people NOT say in public?
- What do people say to other people?
- What do people say to themselves?
- What would you say to your friend in this space?
- What would you say to a stranger in this space?

Responding to the site:

- How do people use this site?
- How does this site make you feel?
- What has this site been in the past?

- What is this site in the present?
- What would you like to see in this site in the future?
- What kind of phrase would reflect the site?
- What kind of phrase would speak to the site?
- What kind of phrase would be completely out of place in the site?

Selection of phrases and letters inventory - 20 minutes

Students are asked to collectively share the phrases that they generated. Students will discuss the merits of each phrase and select 6 phrases that they think would function best in the site. Students will then create an inventory of the letters that they will need to create for each phrase (letters can be reused from one phrase to the next).

The instructor should plan for students to complete one or two letters over the course of the workshop. A parameter for the phrase length would be the number of students in the class (one letter per student).

Day 2

Letter construction - 60 minutes

Using the inventory of letters as a guideline, students will construct letters out of foam and recycled sweaters. Students will first cut out 18 in. letterforms using foam and then cut out pieces of recycled sweaters to sew a cover for the letterform.

Day 3

Letter construction - 60 minutes

Students will continue with their letter construction. Students who finish early can make additional letters and/or embellish their existing letters.

Day 4

Public performance - 60 minutes

Students will go out into the chosen site and spell out their phrases, as well as invite people who traffic the space to respond to the phrases and submit their own phrases. Phrases can either be hand held, propped up against a wall, or secured to a fence with zip ties, yarn, or safety pins.

Students will break out into teams and each team will put up their phrase. In the meantime, other students will document the action on smartphones/cameras. These photos/videos can be shared on an online album, or uploaded to social media and shared via a hashtag. We

recommend a hashtag with the structure #yarnbomb[location] i.e. #yarnbombpacoima or #yarnbombLAHS

Day 5

Debrief - 20 minutes

Students will discuss in a group about their public performance. Prompts for conversation include:

- Which phrases worked the best in the site?
- Which phrases did the public respond to?
- What is the difference between creating a visual representation of a phrase as opposed to saying it in public?

Reflection - 20 minutes

Students will write a short reflection on their experience of the performance and what was discussed. The reflection will address the following prompts:

- How does one activate public space?
- Do people participate enough in public space? Why and how?
- What is the meaning of the space that they activated?
- How does activating a public space uncover existing meaning and create new meanings?

Presentation - 20 minutes

Students will present their reflections to their peers in the workshop. If there is time/if it can be organized, students can also organize a public event at their school and present what they learned in an interactive performance with one or two of the most effective phrases.