

Senior News

Growing, Connecting and Having Fun through Art



"World Leaders at Albany Center Luncheon"

New York City's popular SPARC program – Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide – had a banner 2013-14 year, ending in June. SPARC is an artist-in-residence program at senior centers throughout the City. Professional artists work with center members on creative arts projects that strengthen their sense of competency and self-worth.

Last year's 51 projects covered a rich array of artistic media – including bomba dance and modern dance; music (chorus, ukele band); painting; photography; journal and memoir writing; mask-making and other crafts; even magic. Each project ended with a public presentation at the centers or in the community.

In the Bronx, for example, Lorraine Currelley, a former educator and published poet, offered a creative writing/poetry workshop at Riverside Senior Center that resulted in a 30 page bound anthology.

In Queens, artist Jennie Thwing led SNAP Innovative Senior Center members in creating and filming "[The Living Room](#)," eight stop-motion animations. "The animations were amazing," says Jennifer Bailey, director at SNAP. "They brought to life everything from a tea set and cut-out birds to clothing – a wedding gown and ballet slippers. Since they talked a lot about family and home, they animated old family photographs. And their animations of dolls and toys were outstanding."



During their 2014 SPARC residency, Theresa Loong and Laura Nova of *Feed Me a Story* collaborated with the older adults at LaGuardia Senior Center in Manhattan to lead a weekly "Pot Luck Club" in which participants cooked and shared meals together using recipes that had special significance to individual members. Each session was filmed.

On Staten Island, artist Tattfoo Tan worked with participants at Stapleton Senior Center to create ink-brush style artwork on thermal fax paper. They also recycled paper pulp made from shredded junk mail into new paper, with seeds embedded in it. The seniors then folded these into paper airplanes and flew them onto neglected plots of earth to grow impromptu gardens.

One Brooklyn program, conceived by artist Yana Landowne, turned to world events. Seniors who participated in *If I Ruled the World* at Albany Senior Center chose countries they would like to lead. Throughout the residency they discussed world issues and their ideas for change as the "leader" they had chosen to portray. At the public event, they performed in character and costume at a luncheon to present their ideas to the community and celebrate their power.

SPARC's 2014-15 year promises to be as exciting as the year just past. A joint initiative of DFTA, the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) and borough arts councils, 50 centers have been selected to host resident artists. This month (September), borough arts councils will issue a call to artists inviting applications for residences at the centers. In the final stage of the process, DCA, DFTA and the arts councils will "match" selected artists with senior centers for residencies that will begin January 2015.

Current research into the aging process shows that senior engagement opportunities such as SPARC – social as well as creative – build enhanced self-esteem, promote better problem solving capacity and improve health. Says Carolyn Clark, one of this year's SPARC artists, "Whatever the art form, SPARC is about creating connections – to memories that strengthen elders' sense of self, to new growth through self-expression, and to each other, because, at the end of the day, the most important goal is that our elders know they are not alone."