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Kids & Summer at the TOM

By Kim Skene, Audience Engagement Manager, Tom Thomson Art Gallery



A Collaborative Art Sculpture from one of our summer classes The Sound Art Movement

For many years now at the Gallery, I have organized our ARTadventure programming which consists of summer classes and workshops for children and youth. Studio activities are an important part of what we do here at the TOM and the opportunity to create is an integral part of childhood development. And while I have always popped into the studio, had quick visits with the kids and families, and pitched in where and when extra hands were necessary, this year I have had the unique opportunity to be fully integrated into our summer studio programs, assisting instructors and working with the kids.

There are kids who skip merrily in the door, scoot down the stairs and straight into the studio. These are the TOM veterans who have been to other Gallery workshops and are fully aware of the great week they're going to have. Some, more tentative, take in the huge studio space, set up just for them. Then, eyeballing the tables full of paints, brushes, pencils, markers, glue and goop, these young folks just squirm with anticipation. And there are still others, who, with even more trepidation, quietly take their seats, look about them and wonder what's in store. By the end of the week, no matter how they arrived at the TOM, all the participants stride through the Gallery, familiar with the studio and each other, and confident in themselves. It's a great transformation - and an accelerated one, happening over just five days.

About mid-week, the kids are bursting into the studio, fully engrossed in their ongoing projects and excited about that day's new activities. They know where everything is, what materials they like to use, and what they want to try next. The almost-silence of the first day has grown to a constant chatter and buzz. The clean slate of the studio has become a conglomeration of colour, a creative "production floor" of works-in-progress. Working with such small groups as we do at the TOM, not only does the instructor get to know each child, but all the kids get to know each other. While everyone does individual work of their own choosing, usually, there is also a group piece or collection of works to which all the children contribute. More often than not, the practical elements of their collaborative piece reflect how the

group has worked together; both the artwork, and the motley crew that produced it, exhibit support, structure, compromise, balance and counter balance.

Fridays are complicated. By the end of the week, the hum of the studio has become more of an enthusiastic roar. The studio's condition has deteriorated a bit due to the business of creative production. There are finishing touches, re-workings and do-overs as the young artists self-critique their week's worth of work. There is frenzied activity while they prepare to present their creations to their greatest fans – moms, dads, grandparents and siblings. The anticipation is often mixed with the realization that this is the last day of art class: there are some things that they just didn't get to finish; they will not see their new-found friends at the table the next day.

Fridays are also the best. But not for the reasons you might think. Sure, the roar from the studio dissipates, the grand mess gets cleaned up, and the adults get to regroup; surely those whose offices are closest to the studio breathe a quiet sigh. There are endless studies and statistics citing the importance of creating and enjoying art; I know this, we all know this, but on Fridays I am sure of it. As every single masterpiece is held up for familial inspection, each beaming face says: *I made that; I learned this; We created this.* On Fridays, the walk up the stairs and out the door is a little slower, and not just because of the week's industrious and creative accumulation. At the end of every workshop, I am certain that what we're doing at the TOM is not only significant but essential. Why? Because, this is the last thing I usually hear on Fridays: *I want to come back. Can we come back? And can we go look at the art again too?*