



LIZ TITONE

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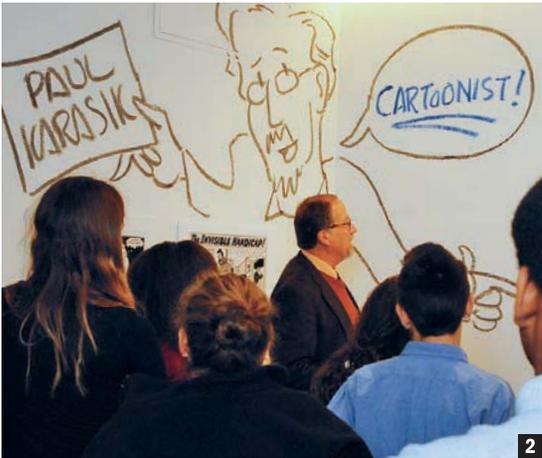
rt Seen From Many Angles

IN BETWEEN THE ATRIUM OVERLOOK and the second floor of the Middle School lies a serene exhibition space: the Carol Shen Gallery. Passing through it at any time of year, one can encounter a variety of art forms on display — prints, photographs, paintings, drawings, comics, or sculpture. One might also encounter a physical education, science, or English class.

The Shen, as it is known by students and faculty alike, is a teaching gallery. It exists to offer students and faculty in every division alternate platforms for engaging in learning. Through the efforts of Elizabeth Eagle and Ken Rush, visual arts teachers who serve as Gallery Coordinators, the artworks that come to the Shen are selected in part for their resonance across a variety of disciplines. During visits to the Gallery, students are encouraged to discover interdisciplinary connections between visual art and their studies in the sciences, the performing arts, world languages, mathematics, history, and literature. In a sense, the Shen Gallery offers



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students field trips within the walls of their own school, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary learning.

Faculty have the option to bring a class to the gallery to meet the artist when he or she is “in residence” at Packer, or to consult with Packer’s in-house Museum Educator, Liz Titone, who creates lessons that help students engage with the exhibitions intellectually and experientially through the lens of a particular discipline [see “Museum Education Explained”].

This fall’s two exhibitions brought a great deal of activity to the Shen Galley. The massive curvilinear steel sculptures of John Clement P’24, P’26 were featured in *Fresh Eyes*, curated by Ms. Eagle [1]. *Fresh Eyes* was a first, and highly successful, foray into large-scale sculpture. A wide range of classes came to explore and interact with the imposing pieces, from physical education, art, and math in the Lower School, to FreshArts and physics in the Upper School. John Clement also hosted students during a two-day residency.

Clement’s sculptures generated a strong response across the student body, and even inspired interdisciplinary collaboration in the form of a sound and movement installation to be performed in Clement’s warehouse-sized studio in Queens this coming spring [see “Interdisciplinary Learning Takes Flight”].

Following *Fresh Eyes* was *The Ride Together: A Brother and Sister’s Memoir of Autism in the Family*, an exhibition of the comics of Paul Karasik [2], a cartoonist and a former



MUSEUM EDUCATION EXPLAINED

BY LIZ TITONE

As Packer’s Museum Educator, I work with the wide range of exhibits that come to the Shen Gallery to create out-of-the-classroom learning experiences for students at all grade levels. With each group of students that comes to the Shen, I start with a specific question, from which we collaboratively build a deeper, more contextualized understanding of the art. The conversation or exercise relates directly to an aspect of the students’ regular curricular work.

Designing curricula for exhibitions appeals to the part of me that loves to solve problems and satisfies my creative itch as an artist. As anyone in education can testify, teaching is a hugely creative process.

I often start my research several months before the show is announced to the faculty. I generate themes to explore through activities that are appropriate for learners of all ages, and propose my ideas to various faculty. Sometimes I distribute a list of themes that the exhibit can illuminate for students.

At the basis of nearly all museum education is visual literacy. Through sight we unpack the information around us, parsing it and making sense of it. Hands-on guidance in this discipline builds students’ confidence in “reading” visual clues and adds to their analytical skill set.

The experiences I design for the students draw upon a combination of literacies — verbal, visual, and kinetic — to help them process and

engage with concepts that might otherwise remain somewhat abstract.

Because the subject matter changes with each exhibition, so do the demands on my knowledge. Sometimes my learning curve even parallels the students’. To design the curriculum for the show *Mysteries in Science*, I had to study a number of physics topics. Starting from scratch in this way is often useful: it makes me sensitive to the students’ perspective. In this case, our group discussions about the art evolved into a collection of principles of gravity that the students used to create collaborative paintings.

Another example of an interdisciplinary lesson was “The Human Animal Project,” created with Eric Weisberg. We began by studying characteristics in an exhibit of animal engravings. Each of Mr. Weisberg’s ninth grade students imagined a character from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* as a specific animal, then created a silhouette of it, guided by Ken Rush, to incorporate into an original piece of writing based on that character.

Ideally, the experience of engaging with art opens up a perspective or insight that might not have been available to the students otherwise. With a seventh grade French class, I asked students to describe a piece of art to a partner who could not see it, while the partner created a sketch based on that description. The challenge of communicating the visual details in a second language struck a chord with the students, one of whom reflected: “This really made me think how difficult it is for people for who[m] English is *not* really their second language. They just know [enough] to pass the test... and to communicate with people in this city. It made me realize how difficult that must be.”

Interactions with art can inspire new ideas — and can make familiar ideas resonate in new and powerful ways. That philosophy is at the heart of museum education.



John Clement discusses the effects of force on his sculptures with students in Chris Williams's AP Physics class.



After exploring the comics of Paul Karasik, students in Todd Johnson's English class draw frames depicting the dream that drives Lennie and George in *Of Mice and Men*.

MORE ON LEARNING IN THE SHEN
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visual arts teacher at Packer (he taught at the School from 1982 to 1989). The memoir that Karasik co-authored with his sister Judy formed the centerpiece of the exhibition. Large- and small-scale reproductions of the book's graphics ran along all four walls of the Gallery. They depicted Paul's experiences growing up with their older brother, David, who had autism.

Eric Weisberg's ninth grade English classes who visited the show compared the visual storytelling techniques of comics with narrative devices in literature. Nitya York's and Todd Johnson's seventh grade students, in the middle of their unit on *Of Mice and Men*, came to explore the similarities between Karasik's portrayal of his relationship with his brother and that of Steinbeck's odd-couple protagonists, George and Lennie. Liz Titone, who designed and led the seventh grade visit, asked the students to take inspiration from Karasik's comics to draw a panel depicting Lennie and George's elusive dream: to "live off the fatta the lan!"

The mission of the Carol Shen Gallery is "to enrich, diversify, and broaden the artistic experience of the Packer community" and to "provide thoughtful and challenging visual arts experiences." This fall, its mission was fulfilled in every respect. **P**

INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING TAKES FLIGHT BY ELIZABETH EAGLE

Interdisciplinary work is very important to me as an artist, educator, and gallery curator. Creating a platform for students to reach further, think more deeply, and experience the arts through a different lens, are reasons why the Carol Shen Gallery is so successful and important as a teaching gallery.

The John Clement exhibition had so many entry points for interdisciplinary learning. The connections felt endless. Even in my early conversations with him, I knew that the formal elements of John's work, the mass and scale — not to mention the story of his becoming an artist — would inspire Packer students.

Then I visited his studio, and I was struck by the space. It's a cavernous, unheated industrial warehouse in Long Island City. Light pours in through small holes in tin walls that rattle in the wind. Bright orange and green pop out where John's completed installations stand. Large steel tubes lie on the ground in an array of shapes. Tools are placed neatly on walls, sketches illustrate the artist's process, forklifts await instruction.

I was struck by two questions: *What is an installation?* and, *How might students — through sound and movement — create an installation inspired by John Clement's work?*

I asked John if we could bring high school students to his studio and let them absorb this creative energy to build their own installation. He responded with a resounding "Yes!"

Esther Harris, the Upper School Choral Director, and Mandy Stallings, who teaches Advanced Dance, jumped on board. The students all visited the Shen, and some of them met with John during his residency.



Then, on a cold November day, Ms. Stallings, Ms. Harris, and I went to his studio with 48 choral and dance students. For two hours, they soaked up the space and interacted with John's work. Then, in shifting groups, they improvised through dance, rhythm, and song. It was thrilling for us to watch.

Over the next several months, the students will collaboratively develop an installation to be performed at John's studio in the spring (when the weather is warmer!).

Giving these students the opportunity to be creators of their own installation, offering them a chance to respond to John's work with an artistic creation of their own, is a powerful example of what interdisciplinary learning can be.



A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN CLEMENT P'24, P'26

What was your experience of the two-day residency at Packer? I always learn a lot about my work by talking to people about it. The way my life is structured, I'm always working. I'm never out of the studio for that long unless I'm on vacation with my family. To sit amongst the work in an educational setting for two whole days was a great experience. I took away a lot.

What struck you about your interactions with the students? Interestingly, they mostly asked the same questions whether they were in Kindergarten or high school.

They asked hard questions, like 'Why did you do that that way?' My answer was, 'Well,

I don't know, that's just the way I did it.' So I started thinking about my motivations, and my vocabulary. Now [nearly two months later] I'm working on three brand new midscale pieces that are going in a different direction than my Shen Gallery work.

The kids also asked how I became a sculptor. But there isn't a very simple explanation. It's interesting: high school students are contemplating who they are and where they're going. Often they think they have to know at a young age what they want to do. But for many people, [discovering that] is a lifelong process.

My goal wasn't to influence anyone to become an artist. But I did try to suggest to the older students, 'Don't paint yourselves into a corner. You don't want to be one dimensional.'

What's your impression of the students' sound and movement installation so far?

It took me a while to get over the initial shock of having so many people in the studio! But it's going to be really fun when it happens. The process feels very organic and fluid. I don't think anybody knows exactly what shape it will take yet, but I'm really looking forward to it.

Why did you agree to it? When I was in high school, I didn't know any artists. For Esther's and Mandy's students, this experience might stay with them. And knowing that Packer students can pursue experiences out of the classroom like this encourages me. My kids are in the Lower School now, but this kind of opportunity can only gain momentum over time.