



Land as local artist

GRADES 9–12

Billie Kearns and Jill Glatt’s exhibition, *Who is Belle Island?* asks, “What does it mean to be a local artist?” and “How can we honour the land with the stories we tell?”

Engage with yourself and community with the following activities:

Art Activities

Experiment with organic dyes

Glatt created dye using the plant, buckthorn, to colour the fabric of her artwork. Get creative concocting your own natural dyes. Collect vegetables or fruits like onion, spinach, beets and blackberries. To extract colour from the plants and make dyes you can use the solar method—soaking the plant matter in water and placing it in a sunlit spot for a week—or by covering the plant matter in water in a saucepan and letting it simmer. When the water is saturated with colour from the material, pour it through a cheesecloth, coffee filter or fabric scrap. Check out Maiwa’s [“Guide to Natural Dyes,”](#) to learn how to apply dyes to various fabrics.

Explore textile art

Glatt’s artwork features depictions of local flora and fauna, and quotes from community members, inspired by Belle Island. Take a thrifted sheet or fabric scrap and create your own piece of textile art inspired by a place that’s meaningful to you. Experiment with fabric paint, dye and markers or try other techniques such as embroidery to add texture to your piece. How is the process of working with fabric different from other art mediums you’ve tried?

Play with poetry

Kearns often takes inspiration from personal experiences, but for *Who is Belle Island?*, she worked with community members and incorporated their sentiments about Belle Island. Think of a place that is meaningful to you. Write a short poem about your experience with this place, and your feelings about it. Then, collect sentiments from others about the same place and incorporate them into your original poem. How does combining your experiences with others change the poem? Does it change how you feel about the place?

Installation view, *Who is Belle Island?* Photo: Garrett Elliott

If you'd like to extend the lesson beyond visual art, here are some other activities:

Reflect on the idea of being local (language)

Consider the question posed by Kearns and Glatt, "What does it mean to be a local artist?" If you do not consider yourself an artist, think about what it means to be a local. What makes you local? Is there a knowledge base required? Is it based on community or connection? Is it the act of living in a place? Write a journal entry or short story about what being a local artist or a local means to you. If you don't feel like a local, reflect on why that is.

Connect with the land (geography)

Create an illustrated map of sites around the town or city you live in that are important to you. Annotate your map with descriptions of the significance of the sites. What does the map tell you about your experience of the place you live?

GLOSSARY

Local: Characterized by, or relating to a particular space or place. A relationship that a person or thing has to a location they exist within.

Sustainable: The extraction or harvesting of resources in a manner that allows the process to continue long-term without crisis or negative effects to the environment.

Installation: A complete, unified experience of art that is usually created for a specific space in a gallery, or for a temporary period of time. It typically features a multi-media work, or a multitude of different pieces that work in unison together.

Transplant: A person or thing that has moved from one place to another.



View from Agnes's studio workshop *Fabric Dyeing with Buckthorn* with artist Jill Glatt. Photo: Tim Forbes



Billie Kearns (aka Billie the Kid) and Jill Glatt, *Who is Belle Island?*, 2023, dye (buckthorn bark, berries, and leaves) and ferrous sulfate on reclaimed fabric. Collection of the artists



Installation detail, *Who is Belle Island?* Photo: Paul Litherland