



MEMORIAL ART GALLERY

Speaking the Language of Art

The Memorial Art Gallery's Creative Workshop draws out the artist in everyone.

By Kathleen McGarvey

FOR THE LAST 30 YEARS, WATERCOLOR painting has been a constant in the life of Rochester native Glenn Miller. "I was lucky never to have had the lesson that watercolor is hard," he says, calling landscape watercolor painting his favorite medium of expression.

▲ **COLORFUL WEDNESDAY:** Students at this year's Spring Art Day School, a weeklong program for kids 7 to 13, watch teacher Lisa Myers explain how to layer color with oil pastels in a day devoted to the exploration of hues. The classes ran six hours per day.

Today, recently retired from teaching photography at Rochester Institute of Technology, Miller is a fixture in the landscape watercolor class at the Memorial Art Gallery's Creative Workshop, taught by painter Dick Kane. The class brings Miller, who has been a regular for seven years, full circle: as a child in the 1940s, he took courses at the gallery, "flinging paint with—and at—other students," he recalls.

The gallery began holding art classes as early as the 1920s, but it wasn't until 1949 that its art school became known as the Creative Workshop. Part of the gallery's education department—which also includes the Charlotte Whitney Allen Library, the school outreach program, the docent program, and a variety of public programs—the workshop offers hands-on art classes taught by artist-teachers to students of all ages, from age two and a half on.

"We're an art school with no degrees, no matriculation, no admissions requirements. Our goal is to make art accessible by doing, for children up to adults," says curriculum director Rachael Baldanza, a member of the workshop since 2004 and a doctoral student in the human development program at the Warner School. Her work there focuses on intergenerational learning spaces, a topic on which she has gathered extensive experience at the Creative Workshop, where classes are offered for kids, for adults, and for children and adults together.

Most of the workshop's more than 50 teachers come either from an art education background or from professional artistic training but with a talent for communicating about their art. "Somewhere along the line, they realized they were teachers," says Baldanza. "In fact, a lot of our teachers started here as students."

Fundamental to the workshop's sense of purpose is the conviction that art is everybody's business: not just its appreciation, but also its production.

"Almost all of us as young children spent a fair amount of time on our tummies, on the floor, drawing and coloring and making all kinds of pictures," says Marlene Hamann-Whitmore, acting director of education. "And unfortunately a lot of us age out of that, which is too bad, because you learn an awful lot by drawing and making. You engage your brain in different ways when you're actively drawing, coloring, writing than when you're sitting passively. If you sit down and look at something, and you pick up even a golf pencil and a piece of scrap paper and start recording what you see, your hand, your eye, your brain, and I think eventually your heart are engaged in a way that they're not if you don't take the time to slow down and look."

The Herdle family—father George, the gallery's first director, and then daughters Isabel and Gertrude, who led the gallery after his death—"gravitated toward the populist and the public, and the idea that anyone could make art," says

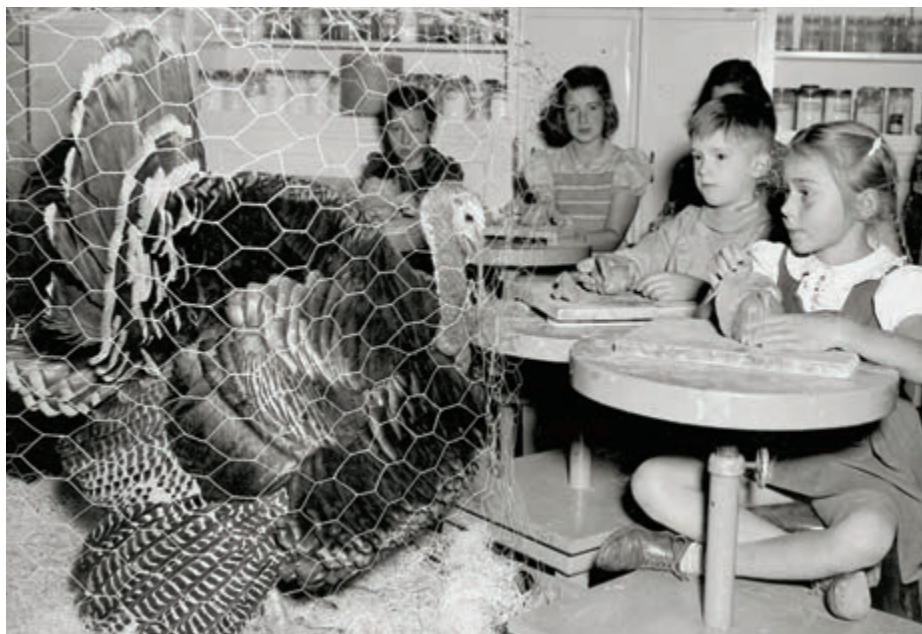
Baldanza.

Having a museum with a hands-on educational component isn't unique, but it's also not typical, says Hamann-Whitmore. But at the gallery, those two pieces—exhibitions and instruction—reinforce each other, with classes visiting the gallery to take inspiration for their own work.

Looking at the collection "makes a huge difference," says workshop teacher Suzanne Kolodziej, whose background is in textiles and art education. She is also outreach coordinator for the East Asia Program at Cornell. In a recent class, she took students to the Asian collection to look at mixing patterns before leading them in a project of making kimonos from origami papers.

In the gallery, "rather than my telling them about art, we talk about what we see," says Kolodziej. "I learn from them what they perceive. It becomes a conversation. It's not so much about information—it's visual."

"It's learning the language of art," says Baldanza of bringing people to the gallery and to the workshop's studios to craft their



own pieces in areas from painting and pottery to weaving and jewelry making. "If you were to learn Spanish, at some point, if your

▲ NOW & THEN: Teacher Suzanne Kolodziej (top, right) confers with Annesha Dasgupta during the Spring Art Day School at the Creative Workshop. The program of the Memorial Art Gallery has for the last 90 years introduced art to students of all ages, including Barbara Mead Strong (bottom, right) and Arthur Cerasani, who, along with other six-year-olds, learned about modeling just before Thanksgiving 1943.

goal was really to speak it, you would go to a Spanish-speaking country and immerse yourself in it." The idea at the gallery, she says, is the same.

Kolodziej sees the workshop as a valuable and inclusive resource. "Not many cities have a studio school. It makes it everyone's museum in a different sense."

Miller agrees. He calls the studio within a gallery "the best of all worlds. We're able to work in an environment where we learn to manipulate the tools of the medium—and then run upstairs to see what the 'masters,' so to speak, did." 