



Jane Moore

# Seeing Outside the Lines:

## Artists Draw Children In and Out with Creative Fun

BY LINDA FAUSEL

Magical transformations are a regular part of Jane Moore's workday, and the more the better. Moore specializes in fiber art, felt-making, to be specific. Moore is a teaching artist who works with students of varying ability-levels, showing kids how to weave fibers into felt, while helping them solidify a greater, growing sense of self.

"We toss around the wool fibers and they are floating in the air like cotton candy," Moore said, "there is this magical transformation."

Moore, 50-something, is one of several professionals working in connection with Artists Working in Education or AWE Inc., an organization founded in 1998 by a handful of art educators, museum curators, and artists concerned about the decrease in funding for state and local art education. AWE artists work with children in schools, and they don't stop there. When AWE's Truck

Studio pulls up to one of several local parks, kids and parents alike know something extraordinary is about to happen.

Sunbursts and clouds decorate the Truck Studio's blue-sky doors; the bumpers are red and green. Four vans make up AWE's Truck Studio Fleet of Imagination—and each one is filled with art supplies to make anything from kites to paper hats to jewelry. Participation in art with the Truck Studio is free.

The AWE School Studio drops off art teachers and adequate supplies to create murals, sculpture, photography, videos, ceramics, fiber art and more. AWE School Studio has interacted with kids at Auer Avenue, 21st Street, Clark, Bryant and McNair Schools, among others.

Moore, a former social worker, has been with AWE for three inspiring years. Moore also works with VSA arts of Wisconsin, a

nonprofit, statewide organization whose mission is to promote the creative power in people with disabilities.

An AWE Inc. fiber art session with Moore incorporates more than the usual senses.

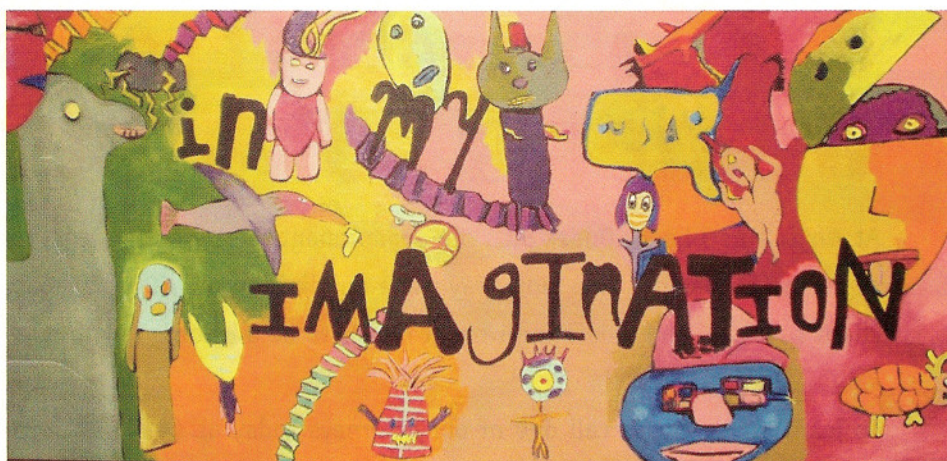
"I use color fibers that have been dyed," Moore said. "We take the wool and lay it out in layers—it's almost like shingling a roof. We lay the layers out on a bamboo mat, and cover it up with a little piece of netting. Then we pour hot, soapy water on it, roll it up in the little mat, and roll and roll. We agitate the fibers and apply pressure and friction. Sometimes the kids drum on their felt art and pretty soon the whole room is drumming in different rhythms. It's very cool!"

Gratitude is an attitude familiar to Moore.

"I feel like the luckiest person in the world to have the privilege of visiting schools and working with children," Moore said. "I learn as much from them or probably more."

Della Wells has been heralded as one of the leading African-American folk artists in the country. Her work has been described as "whimsical collages and bright pastels." Wells, 56, has also been involved with AWE for three years. Her work has been exhibited around the United States, and in May, at Milwaukee's Charles Allis Art Museum.

"A lot of people think art is fluff, or they over intellectualize it -- art is all about our society," Wells said. "Generally what I do





with the kids is, I get them to see the process," Wells said. "I have the children do research on a project and I get them to work in groups. People have a basic instinct to create."

Wells likes to open students' eyes to the unexpected.

"We don't think about art as being the chair that we are sitting on, or the street signs, or the package our shoes come in," Wells said. Art is all around us, and we don't think of it in that sense."

Murals created by Wells and students can

be found in the Clinton Rose Senior Center and Northern Star School.

Barbara Manger founded AWE in 1997. She brought to the table a long history in the field. Manger did her undergrad at Beloit College. She holds two graduate degrees: an MS in Art and an MFA in sculpture from UW-Madison. Manger taught in colleges for about 25 years, including Fayetteville University in North Carolina, Alverno College, and Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee.

Manger, 64, had been working as an

artist in residence at several schools through the Wisconsin Arts Board. She saw the positive impact artist residencies had on the children and the school community. Sometime in the early 1990s, Manger noticed that funding for artist residencies began to decline statewide. Then art education cutbacks in MPS began, and Manger finally saw the writing on the wall, so to speak.

"It was a combination of those two things that started me thinking about what I could do," Manger said.

"I started AWE by asking people to join me in forming an organization to bring artists to work with children in schools," Manger said. "It did not take too much convincing for these great people—educators, art educators, artists—to recognize that funding decreases for art in the schools had adversely effected children and that together we could help improve the situation for children. Sally Duback, whom I had invited to come to our early meetings at Marquette had the idea for free art for children in the parks, so we started doing that once we had the school projects underway."

Soon an organization began taking shape.

"My home was the office," Manger said. "I did the communications, I contacted the schools, visited them, everything."

Today, AWE Inc. has a three member staff and an 18-member board of directors. The office is at 2819 W. Highland Blvd.

In 2003 AWE Inc. received the Governor's Award in Support of the Arts. AWE receives grants from some of the largest funding sources around. Donations are still always appreciated. A new van is on their current wish list.

"AWE has received recent in-kind donations of goods and supplies from the Milwaukee Art Museum docents, who have given us recyclables and supplies of all kinds, and Milwaukee County Parks, Quad Graphics and others," Manger said.

"I think a significant reason why we are successful is that we go to the children," Manger said. "Our projects encourage imagination. We may take an old milk bottle and envision it as a spaceship or a penguin or something else. Making that little milk bottle penguin may seem kind of inconsequential, but it helps a child to see possibilities, and a child who sees possibility can improve her life, venture beyond what might have been programmed for her by where she was born, or whom she was born to." ■

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