

Mark Eanes is a person who has lots of ideas. He is one to whom collaboration - working in partnership - is a natural thing to do. His skill as an idea person lies partly in the fact that he mulls his ideas over until they have fullness and warmth to them, before sharing them with potential partners.

Creative problem solving is a way of life for Mark: the practice of visual art demands this on an almost constant basis. This is another reason that his ideas appeal – they have already been refined by these skills. He curates the ideas and tests them out. When he presents them, the hearer or viewer feels confident of their potential. The spark of inspiration is lit, the glow of future success is apparent, and one wants to get involved and add their skills to the partnership, even with a recognition of the hard work it will take to bring the idea to fruition.

Mark brings a lot to the table.

This is how I got to know Mark. As a collaborator, a partner, joining forces to create and produce projects for our community. During the early years of Arts Benicia's exhibition program, Mark presented ideas for several exhibits, and he and I worked together to bring them to fruition. Among them were "Text/Context, a visual and literary dialogue", co-curated by Mark and Tom Stanton, 1996; "The Next Generation, a celebration of art by kids of all ages", 1998; "Exploring Purple", artwork by developmentally disabled artists, 2000; "Cream, from the top", surfacing talent from regional MFA programs, 2002; and "Zoolatry, a curious menagerie", 2007. "Cream" and "The Next Generation" became annual exhibitions, with wide-ranging adjunct programming involving the community.

Mark treated these projects, and his many subsequent curatorial projects, in the way he describes his approach to his art: as an adventure; an act of discovery entailing fear, risk, and lessons learned, as well as joy in the process and satisfaction in a job well done. I gained much from our collaborations, and am grateful for Mark's enthusiastic sharing of his good ideas and for his support in bringing them to life.

These same qualities enable Mark to maintain steadfast, passionate commitments to two of the most demanding professions there are: teaching, and making art. He has an intense interest in sharing what he has seen and learned in his near 50-year career, and manages to do this in both of his chosen professions. He pays close attention to the world around him, seeking out new places and experiences, locally and around the world, to interpret and share. His curiosity has led him to wander far and wide: to Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Serbia, Croatia, Morocco, India, Cuba, Mexico, Belize, Alaska, and on cross country road trips across the US and Canada.

Mark's enthusiasm for sharing all that he learns and sees in his travels, along with his extensive reading and exploring the work of other artists, serves him well in teaching, in collaborative projects, and most importantly, in his art practice. The many ideas percolating in his curious mind find their way into his paintings and his spiritual largess is evident in the collaborative aspects of the work.

Scraps of sheet music, book pages, calligraphy, maps, architectural renderings, newspaper clippings, magazine fragments, letters, notes - objects created and used by people who are part of human culture – are often present in his paintings. I see the presence of these as collaborations between the artist and another person: named, or anonymous. By incorporating these ephemeral objects, Mark invites them to acquire a new identity, a place to be seen again as part of the work. The titles are often taken from an element in the painting, sometimes recognizable, often obscure, but a significant part of the partnership. The viewer's imagination is quickened by this mysterious alliance, and we are connected to these strangers by curiosity, making us partners too.

Mark has called himself a Passionate Spectator (it's the title of his 2019 show at the Triton Museum of Art), which he certainly is.

I would add that he is a passionate participant as well, and we who know him and his work are the richer for it.

Kathryn Weller Renfrow

Former Gallery/Executive Director, Arts Benicia, 1993 – 2009

Co-Curator, "Mark Eanes, Shifting Sands"