

Beyond Streaming: A Sound Mural for Flint

JAN TICHY



ELI AND EDYTHE **BROAD ART MUSEUM** AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
MSU FEDERAL CREDIT UNION **ARTIST STUDIO SERIES**





Beyond Streaming
A Sound Mural for Flint

Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University
MSU Federal Credit Union Artist Studio Series: Jan Tichy

Some Notes on Caring

Steven L. Bridges, Assistant Curator

By its very definition, curatorial work is rooted in notions of care. The term *curator* derives from the Latin word *curare*, which has a number of meanings, including to care for, study, and oversee. In the past, curators were quite literally charged with the care of specific collections, as well as the histories and knowledge attached to them. In the field of contemporary art, however, highly skilled registrars and conservators now perform many of these functions, leading one to wonder how the notion of care remains relevant to the field today.

As a curator, what do I care for, for whom do I care, and why? In fact, I believe the notion of care is still highly relevant, but it has shifted from caring for objects to caring for the relationships involved in an exhibition or project, among artists, audiences, gallerists, collectors, donors, and others. The curator is often the glue between these different protagonists, and the level of care invested significantly influences the quality of the work undertaken collectively.

But there is another dimension of care that also bears on the work I do. It grows out of a sense of empathy and is directed toward individuals, groups, and communities who, for one reason or another, are marginalized and experience forms of civic neglect or discrimination. Contemporary art and artists are often deeply invested in social issues, and so I would like to suggest that “care” is the work of not only curators, but also the institutions they serve. After all, museums are civic entities and have a stake in the quality of life of their constituents. Most immediately connected to their local communities, they are also enmeshed in regional, national, and international communities. Furthermore, the field of art offers a different way of looking at and understanding the world around us, in part by making the invisible visible—that is, the power relations that organize societal life, as well as “invisible” people, the overlooked and undervalued, within different societies.

With these thoughts in mind, I felt a responsibility to address the Flint water crisis after moving here to mid-Michigan. Flint made headlines in 2014 after the source of its public water system was switched from the Detroit water supply to the Flint River, which led to high levels of heavy-metal neurotoxins in the water and created health problems for many residents—children in particular. Still today, the crisis is a daily reality for many citizens who lack direct access to clean, safe water.

Based on the success of his recent community-based initiatives that respond directly to contemporary sociopolitical issues, I invited the artist Jan Tichy to participate in the MSU Federal Credit Union Artist Studio Series to specifically respond to the situation in Flint. As outsiders, our first steps were to better familiarize ourselves with the water crisis there. After many conversations with community members, educators, city workers, and cultural organizations; attending public hearings; and generally spending time in the city, Tichy and I became aware of how a lack of communication between Flint and Lansing—the seat of state political power—played a significant role in the creation of the water crisis and its exacerbation over time. The practice of art can also be understood as a form of communication, and so it became intriguing to consider how Tichy could draw attention to this disconnect and even attempt to reestablish communication through alternative means.

This led to the artist's collaboration with two classes of high school students who worked together to develop content for the exhibition at the museum. Through a series of three workshops, nearly seventy students from Carman-Ainsworth High School in Flint and Everett High School in Lansing convened to explore how different forms of creative expression can communicate ideas and messages, while also touching on themes of social and restorative justice. The decision to work with high school students was purposeful and meaningful for Tichy. As the potential leaders of tomorrow, and representatives of the cities from which they hail, these students must learn the importance of remaining open to the concerns of others, to listening, to being present. In short, the sense of care cultivated through their interactions now has the potential to be extended to others in the future—something glaringly absent in the unfolding of events around the Flint water crisis.

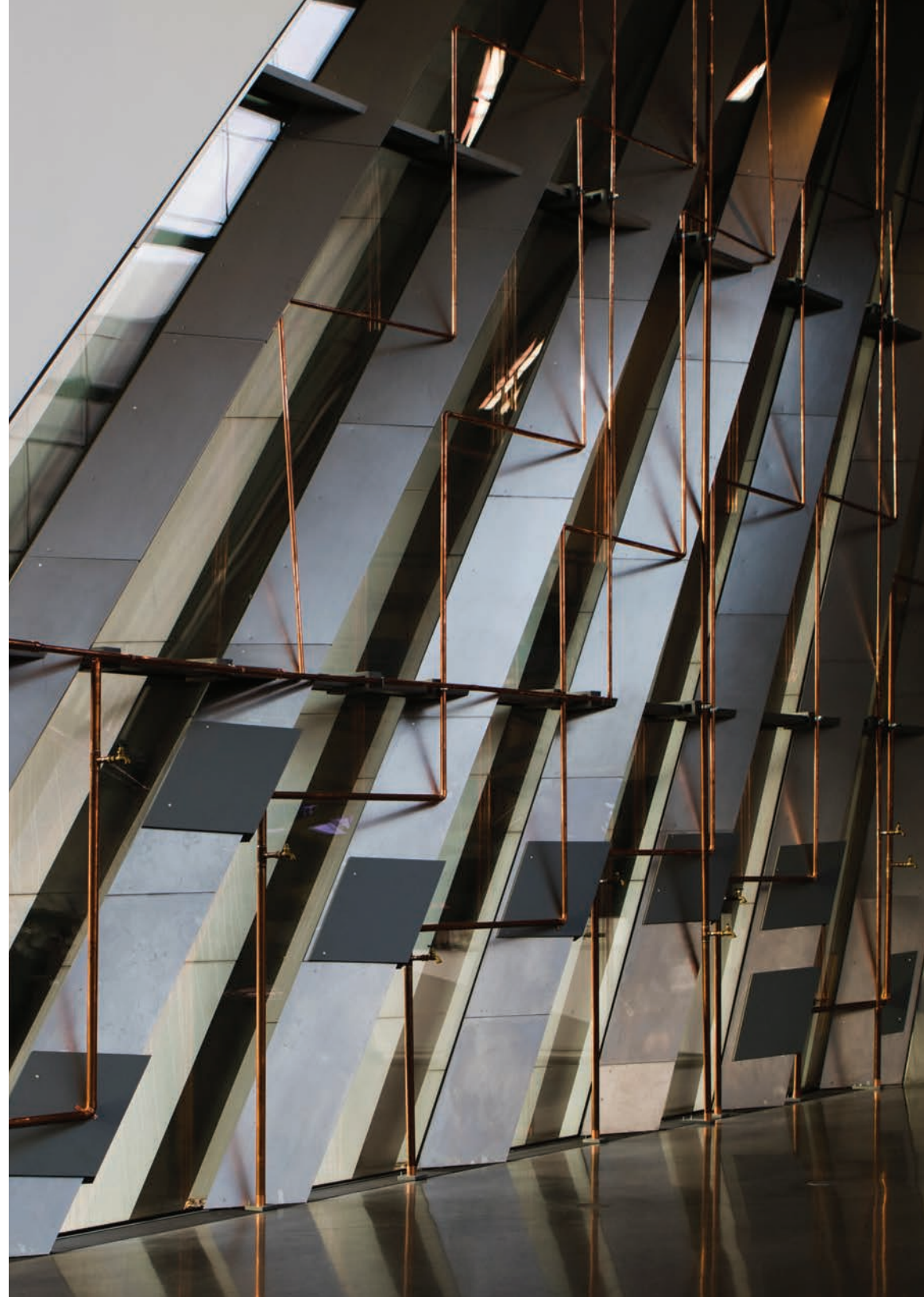
At the time of writing, many unknowns remain as to the impact of this project, including its reception by the different audiences of the museum and beyond. But one thing is certain: art is not about fixing problems or providing clear-cut answers to complex questions. This project does not intend to remediate the water contamination in Flint, nor to restore the loss of trust between government officials and the residents of Flint. For this is a key point: the Flint water crisis is not solely the problem of Flint residents. The many failures that produced the crisis run deeper than what has been projected by the media, which often operates in response to a need for immediate answers. Rather than pointing fingers, Tichy and his collaborators acknowledge a shared sense of responsibility to act and make one's voice heard—in the hopes that others will not simply hear, but listen. When words flow like water, momentum grows, and the possibility of change produces new realities.

Cu 30, 2017

Copper pipes, fittings, and valves, wooden clamps, speakers, acrylic paint, and media players

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Beyond Streaming: A Sound Mural for Flint is part of the MSU Federal Credit Union Artist Studio Series, making it possible for working artists to visit, educate, and interact with the community.





The students from Flint and Lansing were paired up to facilitate direct interactions. The drinking cups were part of an exchange in which each student brought a cup from home to give to his or her counterpart as a gesture of goodwill and a sign of their shared responsibility.

Student Voice and Choice

Meghan Zanskas, Manager of Education

To be heard.

Imagine knowing that people will approach this artwork and listen to your story. Strangers from around the world will hear your voice and see your imagery and ideas, glimpsing your unique perspective as a teenager living in Michigan in 2016.

What would you want them to hear and see?



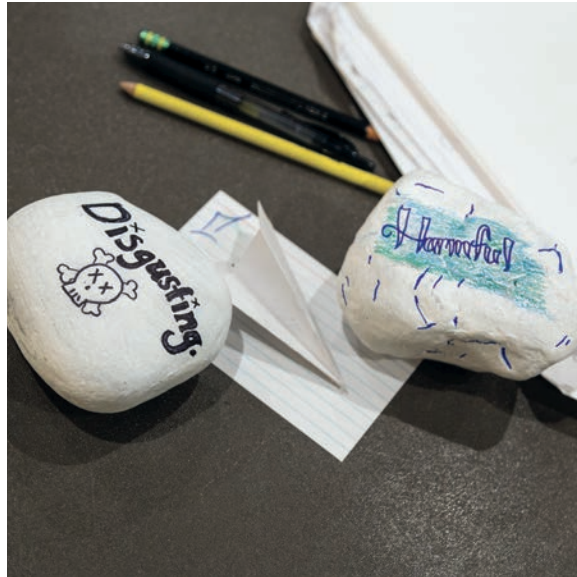
This MSU Federal Credit Union Artist Studio Series with Jan Tichy is perfectly suited for student engagement, empowerment, and transformation. As an educator, I take every opportunity to share the story of what Tichy has been doing with these young artists and poets. By integrating social engagement into their daily work at school, and having that work recognized as valuable and important by a contemporary artist and art museum, this project is having a profound impact on the way these young adults view themselves and their potential to have a voice in their communities.

Their voices reveal to us how assumptions and misunderstandings wrinkle our perceptions of the people and places we see on the news. During Tichy's first visit to Carman-Ainsworth High School, a student said, "It's not *what* you know about Flint, it's *who* you know from Flint," words that her classmates applauded and echoed. This project created a special space for teenage representatives of two communities involved in the Flint water crisis to form relationships, share personal stories, and collaborate on ideas for visualizing their thoughts, which range from messages of hope to anger, protest, and awareness.

We have heard from countless adults through the political and media dialogue surrounding the Flint water crisis, but have we taken time to get to know any of them, let alone the teenagers, children, and other citizens involved? A Flint-based reporter who was covering our first workshop pulled me aside to express her enthusiasm for this project. She shared how it was authentically and refreshingly different from the exhaustive list of other events she had covered throughout the water crisis. When I speak with educators, the response is similar. They muse on ways their schools could make more time and space for student voice and choice, using social engagement through the arts. This is student-centered learning at its finest, with the content and direction of the project firmly rooted in the experiences of the students.

A special thank you to Pam Collins, Jessyca Mathews, and their incredible students for sharing their stories, time, artwork, and poetry.

We are honored to look and listen.



The workshops took place in both cities and consisted of various activities. During the second workshop at Everett High School in Lansing, the pairs of students were each given a rock painted white that they were asked to decorate. This rock offers clues as to the discussions that transpired.





Pipes

Jan Tichy, Artist

Pipes, tubes, conveyers of fluids. The cylindrical channels make us and surround us, in nature as in infrastructure. They crack, we ache. In contact with the distant, we connect through them. The content defining the purpose. The substance. The water. The words. Delivering the sentence with an address. We released poison into the pipes and did not listen. We were poisoned and not heard. Two ends of a pipe. Reverse the flow. Change the principal substance. The conduit of information, fluid of sound. Copper capillaries circulate the voices, horns woven into the glass architecture. Listen to murals.









About the Artist

Jan Tichy is an artist and educator, working at the intersection of video, sculpture, architecture, and photography. Born in Prague in 1974, Tichy studied art in Israel before earning his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he is now an assistant professor in both photography and art and technology studies. Tichy has had solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; the Santa Barbara Museum of Art; the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Chicago Cultural Center; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; and the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, among others. In 2011 he created *Project Cabrini Green*, a community-based art project that illuminated the last high-rise building in Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing projects with spoken word recordings, prior to and during its month-long demolition. In 2014, Tichy began work on a long-term, NEA-supported community project in Gary, Indiana, titled the *Heat Light Water Project*. His works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Magasin Stockholm Kunsthall; and the Indianapolis Museum of Art, among others.

This catalogue is published by the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (Broad MSU) on the occasion of the exhibition *Beyond Streaming: A Sound Mural for Flint*, on view January 21–April 23, 2017. The exhibition is part of the MSU Federal Credit Union Artist Studio Series, which invites artists to interact with the community through site-specific installations presented alongside educational encounters that offer insight into the artists' creative processes.

This iteration of the MSU Federal Credit Union Artist Studio Series is organized by Steven L. Bridges, Assistant Curator at the Broad MSU, with assistance from Meghan Zanskas, Manager of Education. Support is provided by MSU Federal Credit Union and MSU Infrastructure, Planning, and Facilities.

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Visit beyondstreaming.org for further information and documentation.

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