What Matters  Concept by Lana Yu

This mural transcribes the words of “what matters” from individuals of all walks of life. The mural, created by eighty-eight people is presented in the center of Peekskill, NY as a way to share our thoughts with one another. One-thousand words have been gathered and continue to be gathered through live events and the internet. This interactive project and the mural creates an opportunity for people to reflect on the larger view of life. Participants are of every age and cultural background. The purpose is to break down barriers of perceived separateness and unify the community.

Discover what matters and share your thoughts at: http://whatmatters.lanayu.net/
See photos of the project in the making: https://www.flickr.com/photos/lanayu/ 
View the mural on the Park St. Garage in Peekskill
Across from the DMV building at 1045 Park St. (between Bank St. and South James St.)

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About the Project

*What Matters* is an on-going interactive public art project that affects people’s lives in surprising and unexpected ways. Through live events and a public mural the project engages people of any age, background or culture to write a few words about what matters. The objective is to give all people including those who may not normally have an opportunity to express themselves a chance to contemplate what they find meaningful in life. This is an opportunity to take pause from the pressures of the day to focus on a larger view of human existence. In doing so each participant enriches their own existence for a moment and in turn enriches a moment for another who will read what they have written.

Both the interactive portion of the project and the mural taps the community as content and context. The process of collecting phrases is a highly interactive process that engages each individual in a personal way. The mural takes a representative sampling of some of the most engaging and universal phrases contributed by the public to create the design. This is presented in the public sphere bringing the community together once again to interact and respond. At its best the piece transforms a space and make it a place of contemplation and cultural interest. The mural is a reminder to the community of what matters to them directly expressed by them.

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Top left: Peekskill Arts Alliance Pop-up Gallery, Oct. 20–Nov. 8, 2012; Top right: Los Andes Bakery interactive exhibit, Oct 2013 to May 2014
Bottom: Fred’s Pantry at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Oct. 2013
Where We’ve Been

Since the project’s inception in 2012 the public has been invited to come sit and write a few words of reflection in any language. The project kicked off in the summertime where seventy youths wrote words of What Matters on the sidewalks of Main Street. Working with a Spanish-speaking volunteer, we spent a morning later that Fall gathering words from patients and staff at Peekskill’s Hudson River Healthcare. What Matters was also at the opening weekend of the Peekskill Project V, a year-long, city-wide public art event, created by the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (HVCCA), where we engaged the public at the gazebo at the center of town and at also at entrance to the museum. At the Peekskill Arts Alliance show on Main St. we gave folks an opportunity over a three week period during Thanksgiving and Hurricane Sandy to write and read what others have written. A month later we were at the Peekskill Project Pop-up Gallery for a weekend run alongside cutting-edge artworks among notable artists. What Matters was also at the Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber of Commerce during Peekskill Open Studios the following summer during Lana Yu’s art show entitled “Forces of Nature” where she gathered words from visitors who came to see the show. On Welcher Ave. the experience was brought to over a dozen day-laborers who were waiting for construction work. As the days grew short again, we engaged seniors, families and young people at Fred’s Pantry at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church on an early Saturday morning. In the Fall of 2013, Ridvan Foxhall of the New Era Creative Space shared What Matters with her girl empowerment group bringing the project to pre-teen girls. In January through February of 2014 the Bean Runner Cafe hosted a unique interactive exhibition summing up all the places we’ve been. The show featured words and pictures of What Matters, photos of fifteen live events, and the process of making the mural with the community. The exhibition also engaged the public to share what matters and post the words on large magnetic boards. From March-April of 2014, What Matters went to NYC in a show at the Bronx Community College to find out what matters to students, faculty and community that visits the college. From October 2013 to May 2014 a growing wall of post-it notes inspired pause everyday, Los Andes Bakery in Peekskill. In the Fall of 2014, those who care for others were treated to a day long What Matters experience at the Leave the Light On Annual Day of Pampering for Caregivers in Cortlandt, NY. In addition words from people like you are travelling as part of Carla Rae Johnson’s Alternet project to Libraries in NY State and NC where they reach an even broader audience. Among these events over a thousand participants of all walks of life have gathered to share their thoughts.

The Mural

From December of 2013 to April 2014 eighty-eight individuals painted the What Matters mural to be erected on the Park Street Garage in the center of downtown Peekskill. The mural is comprised of painted text for all to notice, becoming a focal point of contemplation that represents the individual voices of the community. And like many of our thoughts they are at once personal, but also universal. When the words are shared in a public forum we communicate our thoughts and feelings with one another. In this way the installation breaks down barriers of perceived separateness and unifies the community, both local and further flung.
Where We Are Going

The interactive experience of sharing the words will continue, reaching the broadest possible audience. A documentary film about the project is currently in the works. Lana Yu welcomes others to take the What Matters concept to their groups and communities. The artist will make herself available to consult and provide advice on how to carry out a community What Matters project. The artist requests that people share their stories, words and pictures so that she may archive the experience to share with a larger audience. The experience is currently shared on the project’s website at:

http://whatmatters.lanayu.net/

About the Artist, Lana Yu

Art is a way to understand ourselves and the world we live in more deeply. Lana Yu is a mixed-media painter who draws on her emotions and the physics of paint and materials to explore her relationship with herself, others and her environment. After working as a graphic designer and creative director designing educational software and websites for almost twenty years, a life-altering car accident put her life on a new path. In search of a new home, the artist moved to Peekskill, New York in 2010 to be a part of an artist community. She found herself looking out her studio window where she observed school kids walking home, seniors sitting outside and day-laborers waiting for work. She wanted to know the people she lived among. In Peekskill she discovered up-close what it is to live in a place of great diversity but also with social and economic challenges. She wondered how art could transform a place and contribute to our understanding and appreciation of one another. She began to get involved in public art projects with the community, including a mural about personal truth, a tree sculpture made of driftwood in honor of those affected by HIV, and now the What Matters project.

Her desire is to use art to engage all people in an act of personal, self-expression, not only those who consider themselves artists. In doing so, we find ourselves and our connection to one another.
Support for this Project

The What Matters mural is a gift from the artist, Lana Yu to the City of Peekskill for all people to enjoy.

*What Matters* is a grass-roots project mostly powered on volunteer support and in-kind donations from various businesses. Financial support comes cash donations raised from three fundraisers and a grant from ArtsWestchester. Approximately seventy-two individual donors from the community and the artist’s personal network of friends who believed in this project financed the bulk of this project. Additional donations were made from sixteen local businesses that provided donations and in-kind support through materials for the mural and food for our fundraisers. Significant sponsors are named below:

**GOLDEN ARTISTS COLORS**

Golden Artists Colors has provided acrylic paint and MSA varnish for this mural.

**ARTSW**

This project is partially funded by a grant from ArtsWestchester. Arts Alive Project Grants are made possible with funds from the Decentralization Program (DEC), a regrant program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the NYS Legislature and administered by ArtsWestchester.

**HVCCA**

The Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art (HVCCA) is the fiscal agent for this project enabling us to offer donors a tax-deductible donation. This project has also been a part of the Peekskill Project V, A Citywide festival of Contemporary Art devoted to bringing cutting edge contemporary art out of the museum and into the community.

**BID**

The Peekskill BID (Business Improvement District) which represents the tenants, businesses, citizens, artists and landlords in downtown paid for the installation of the mural.

For a complete list of participants and donors see:

http://whatmatters.lanayu.net/our-supporters/