



Photo by Ken Aaron, August 27, 2013. Contact the artist Aquil Virani directly at aquilvirani@gmail.com. Learn more at aquil.ca.

THE WE ARE ALL ARTISTS PROJECT: A “SMASHING SUCCESS” AT PAUL SMITH’S COLLEGE

Canadian artist creates successful community art piece at Paul Smith’s Welcome Week 2013

PAUL SMITHS, NEW YORK - Since his early teenage years, artist Aquil Virani has been bringing people together by creating collaborative artworks that feature the inspiration of hundreds of project participants. On August 27th, Virani unveiled a memorable 4 x 6 foot painting to the Paul Smith’s College community in New York; it was painted live on campus and included the contributions from over 200 incoming freshman students.

Having taken this idea to different communities across Canada – and in this case, across the continent - Virani says that the project is both "about revealing the artist in everyone and bringing people together." Instead of the traditional model where a painter works alone and shares the work only when it is finished, he has begun painting with participants and including them directly in the creation process.

“Aquil’s ‘We Are All Artists’ project was a perfect fit for the college,” says Curt Stager, Professor of Natural Sciences at Paul Smith’s. “It beautifully captures and contributes to the spirit of community, and it shows that the arts are an important part of who we are and what we do here.” The collaborative art project attracted the attention of several local press organizations, including a 10-minute radio spot on NCPR and a front-page article in the Adirondack Daily Enterprise.

“When this idea resonates with people that everyone is an artist,” Virani says, “it’s a beautiful thing.”

The “We Are All Artists” project started at Paul Smith’s College on August 23. The final painting was unveiled at the closing ceremonies of Paul Smith’s Welcome Week on August 27. Contact artist Aquil Virani directly at aquilvirani@gmail.com. Find out more information about the artist at aquil.ca.



SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Virginia (Ginny) McAleese (shown on the left) for her contagious enthusiasm for the project and her unwavering support throughout the process. I'd also like to thank Professor Joseph (Joe) Conto for putting me in touch with Ginny and Paul Smith's College at the very beginning of the project.

HOW IT WORKED

[1] Students doodled on a small piece of scrap paper.



[2] I painted the canvasses live in the Students' Centre.



[3] We unveiled the piece at a full-school ceremony.



MY MESSAGE TO STUDENTS

- If you can write 'ABC', *you can draw.*
- Art-making builds *communities.*
- The first step is always *participation.*

LOCAL PRESS



Adirondack Daily Enterprise. Shaun Kittle, "Unifying Freshmen." [Link](#). Incoming freshman at Paul Smith's College were welcomed this week with several events, including treks and a group art project all their own. For the first time, the college brought in Aquil Virani, a visual artist and graphic designer from Montreal. He welcomed the new students on Friday and told them, "If you can write 'ABC' on a piece of paper, you can draw. Virani asked the students to doodle on scraps of paper and explained that he would re-draw the images onto a three-part collage painting called "We Are All Artists."...



North Country Public Radio (NCPR). Todd Moe, "Aquil Virani: Revealing the artist in everyone." 10 minutes, 18 seconds. [Link](#). A Canadian visual artist worked with first year Paul Smith's College students over the weekend on a community art project. Aquil Virani is a graphic designer for L'Oreal Canada and on the side, he travels across the country - or in this case, the continent - working on community art projects. He's spent the last few days at Paul Smith's College as part of Welcome Week. His motto, as he told the freshmen class recently, "Everyone is an artist." He took a break for a conversation about collaborative art revealing the artist in everyone and how art can bring people together...

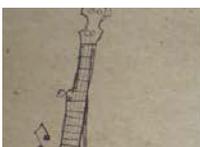


**PRESS
REPUBLICAN**

Plattsburgh Press Republican. Jack LaDuke, "We Are All Artists." (Photo Of The Day) [Link](#). Two incoming Paul Smith's College freshmen, Jacqueline Goley (left) and Jacqueline Johnson (right), confer with Aquil Virani about their sketches for a collaborative art piece led by the Montreal-based visual artist during the We Are All Artists project at the school in Paul Smiths over the weekend. More than 200 new students took part in creating the work.

STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS

After addressing all of the students briefly, I asked for a drawing contribution. I said that the theme was fairly open. The drawing could relate to your hopes for the future as a Paul Smith's student. It could be about the college itself. It could be a little piece of you. But at the very least, draw something so that you participate in this community project. Below, you can see a few of the different drawings – doodles ranging in subject matter and style, from a beautiful banjo to an abstract pattern of overlapping circles...



THE FINAL ARTWORK



“We Are All Artists.” 4 x 6 feet in 3 panels. Acrylic on canvas. Unveiled August 27, 2013.

The main image here is what is famously known at Paul Smith’s College as the “**Leaning Pine,**” a large tree that stood on campus until 1971. It is used as the college’s logo design and is the most recognizable symbol associated with the “College of the Adirondacks.”

With blues, greens, and browns, the artwork’s color palette references the **beautiful nature surrounding the college.** The 200+ doodles exist in a cohesive mass, representing the individual voices that unite to form a community of creative contributions. The vertical “drips” suggest an encompassing rainfall where shelter is provided by the leaning pine.

The artwork is about revealing the artist in everyone. It’s about bringing people together. The idea is that we are all artists and **together, we can create something greater than ourselves.**

SUPPORT FROM STUDENTS & STAFF



"The art project that Aquil created for the freshman class here at Paul Smith's College gave us all a real confident boost. It reminds us all of Aquil's message – that **if you put your mind to it, no matter what 'it' is, you can do it.** I know that if I'm having a bad day or even a bad week, I can simply look at the painting and be inspired to keep trying." – Julia Priolo

"It is always great to keep art interesting and fresh which Aquil is doing. This project we did really intrigued many different types of people which goes to show that art connects people together. This was a great project and an awesome idea." – Robert Holden

"It was a pleasure having Aquil visit Paul Smith's College. Not only did he make a beautiful mural, but he also gave us all the opportunity to add to it. **It brought out an artistic side in all of us.**" – Bob Cipperly

"The project was really neat; I love how it included all of the students who wanted to participate. I was really excited when I found my own doodle on the canvas!" – Nicole Armstrong

"I thought the project was amazing. When you look at the painting, there are more than 200 drawings and each of them has a different meaning behind it. When you revealed your painting to everyone in the gym, I was amazed. **It was beautiful!**" – Kailey Suplinskas

"I felt that the art project was a great uniting experience for the freshmen class. **It made me feel like we belonged here** and were part of the campus right from the start." – Allison (Alliy) Lewis

"Aquil's 'We Are All Artists' project was a perfect fit for Paul Smith's College. **It beautifully captures and contributes to the spirit of community** and it shows that the arts are an important part of who we are and what we do here." – Professor Curt Stager

"The collaborative nature of the *We Are All Artists Project* provided a perfect means for our new students to begin their journey at Paul Smith's College and to see themselves as valued members of our campus community. Aquil Virani brought enthusiasm, energy, passion and a phenomenal work ethic!...**The impact of this project on our campus will long be remembered!**" – Director of the Academic Success Centre, Virginia (Ginny) McAleese

HIKING MOUNT BAKER



On Sunday morning, Ginny invited me to take a break from the campus scenery to enjoy a hike (or “trek”) with a group of freshmen students. We climbed to the top of Mount Baker and soaked up the sun after a bit of exercise. It was a fantastic opportunity to get some fresh air and connect with students in a different setting.

NEXT YEAR?

With such an amazing response from participants and community members across the board, I was asked on many different occasions from various students and faculty whether or not I will be coming back next year. I would be **absolutely delighted to visit again** next year to create another art piece with the new class of freshmen at Paul Smith’s College!

CONTACT ME

It is best to reach me by email at aquilvirani@gmail.com.
(You can also phone me during the work day at 514 281 2758.)

[APPENDIX A] ARTIST BIO

Aquil Virani (b. 1991, Vancouver, BC, Canada) is a Montreal-based visual artist and graphic designer. After graduating from McGill University with a BA in Philosophy and Marketing and the J.W. McConnel major scholarship, he continued his work as a branding specialist and graphic designer at L’Oréal Canada. He held the first solo art show ever at McGill University, running the first “We Are All Artists” project over three years and amassing media coverage from across the country. *[more at aquil.ca/about]*

