

PUBLIC ART PROJECT: CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND FLOOD AWARENESS

WHAT

Ocean City Arts Center was one of five organizations in the State to receive a 2023 Community-Based Arts Grant. This Community-Based Arts Grant Program was created by the New Jersey DEP Coastal Management Program (CMP), in partnership with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and with funding from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The grant was created to help coastal communities learn more about climate impacts on their community.

WHERE

With this grant, OCAC formed exciting partnerships with two barrier islands' cultural organizations, the Longport Public Library in Longport, and the Rita Schiavo Memorial Library in Strathmere.

Longport Historical Museum -

On Display throughout the summer season

Location: Longport Historical Museum, 2300 Atlantic Ave, Longport

Rita Schiavo Memorial Library

On Display throughout the summer season

Location: 801 Commonwealth Ave, Strathmere

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

OCAC and the Longport and Strathmere libraries brought together residents and the artist, [Jessica Mungekar](#), to create visual artwork that represents flood awareness and resilience, something that is vitally important to our barrier island communities. Jessica is from Washington Township, NJ and was selected through a grant process, as well. The public art obviously has a specific theme and purpose. The theme is *climate resilience and flood awareness*, and the purpose is to communicate information on the theme using the arts as a tool. .

The overall project consists of four community workshops and two public events unveiling the final public art. The artist, Jessica, instructed the workshop participants to think about how coastal flooding affects them – before, during and after storms. In Strathmere, the Bayshore Center at Bivalve presented a workshop on moon phases and tides to help bring home how that impacts coastal flooding. The participants came up with images, visual stories, and words to convey the experience of their community and the artwork comes to life. With the hands-on art-making approach instilling the theme, the works created during one of the community workshops are individual 5” cement spheres the participants will incorporate into the overall art installation but will get to keep. For the grounds at each location, they also worked together creatively on several 20+” cement spheres which were artistically enhanced by the artist before installation.

THE ARTIST

[Jessica Mungekar's](#) favorite form is the sphere. Jessica says, "The Greeks saw the circular shape as representing the 'divine' and 'natural balance'. When I was awarded this project, I began listening to members of the local communities about what they wanted in a climate resilience sculpture, all the while reflecting and thinking about an approach that the community would react positively to. I wanted to work with them to create something with thought-provoking meaning and a statement of empowerment. I believe it is essential for people who live in fragile ecosystems such as the Jersey Shore to feel they have the fortitude to persevere and knowledge that gives wisdom.

I approached this interactive sculpture's design through symbolism and the visitor's visual experience. The visual impact of the sphere gives visitors a feeling of calm, and groundedness, allowing them to quietly, comfortably, and safely reflect on the earth, Mother Nature, and climate resilience.

"The circle is a universal symbol that represents totality, wholeness, original perfection, the Self, the infinite, eternity, timelessness, all cyclic movement..." (Hermes Trismegistus).

"The sphere may be one of the simplest forms and the container that can hold all other forms. All measurements are equal in a sphere. It is a figure that is complete in its entirety. From the earth to an atom are all spheres." - Unknown."

A sphere's perfect symmetry represents everything important to Jessica; stability, balance, and a feeling of quiet peace." Jessica holds a BFA in painting from Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) and MSW from Temple U. She has been working in cement since 2018 and has shown in exhibitions starting in 2021 in Philadelphia and New Jersey, including "The Wintergarden" at Dilworth Park (Philadelphia), the "New Hope Arts Sculpture show" in New Hope, PA, and for two consecutive years at the Main Line Arts Center (Haverford, PA). She has permanent public sculptures at Perkins Art Center, Collingwood; Washington Lake Park, Washington Twp., Gloucester County, NJ, and at Rutgers Arboretum.

"When I saw Jessica's work, I knew they would be perfect for the mission and goals of this climate resilience project. Her vivid color palette and planet-like orb sculptures make her work relevant to this project and accessible to various age groups and cultures. It is always exciting to see how the arts can be used as a communication tool." Chase Jackson, Executive Director, Ocean City Arts Center

CREDITS

This Community-Based Arts Grant Program was created by the New Jersey DEP Coastal Management Program (CMP), in partnership with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and with funding from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to help coastal communities learn more about climate impacts on their community. OCAC and the Longport and Strathmere libraries brought together residents and the artist to create visual artwork that represents flood awareness and resilience, something that is vitally important to our barrier island communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Specials thanks to Rickey Gerhardt, Director of Longport Public Library, Melissa Warren, Director of Rita Schiavo Memorial Library for their enthusiasm for the project and assistance every step of the way. A resounding round of applause for each of the town's participants for their interest, time and talent to bring this project to life.

For more information, call Ocean City Arts Center at 609-399-7628.

