

AMARA GEFFEN

Founder and Director Art & Environment Initiative (A&EI)

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Biographical Information

Amara Geffen is a public artist and founder/director of the Art & Environment Initiative (A&EI) in Meadville, PA. A&EI fosters community-focused, public and environmental art. These projects serve as tools for placemaking, environmental and community enrichment, and as celebrations of “the local.” Amara has exhibited widely, receiving grants and awards for her projects that engage countless local residents, numerous artists—regional, national, and international—, a host of state and local government agencies, as well as scientists, environmental engineers, landscape architects, hydrologists and more. Her early work is included in a collection of contemporary ceramic sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In 2014 she received Governor Raymond P. Shafer’s award for Excellence in Community Service and secured a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town grant for Conneaut Lake Borough. That project resulted in revitalization of Fireman’s Beach, a proposal for a public art trail along the lake, and one community-inspired, public sculpture: *Ganesh: Remover of Obstacles*. Amara is one of four co-editors for *Ecoart in Action: Activities, Case Studies, and Provocations for Classrooms and Communities*, published by New Village Press in January 2022.

Public Art Projects

- 2023 *Celebrating Mill Run*, constructed relief mural (*The Arc Community Greenspace*).
- 2022 *Birds on a Wire*, constructed relief mural (*The Arc Community Greenspace*).
- 2020 *Bloom Where You Are Planted*, Meadville, PA. A constructed relief mural completed in connection to The ARC Community Greenspace. Collaboration with Crawford County Coalition on Housing Needs for the Snodgrass Building (low-income housing project). The mural features larger-than-lifesize flowers and pollinators and stands at 31’ tall by 24’ wide.
- 2018/23 *The ARC Community Greenspace*, Meadville, PA. A collaboration with A&EI, The ARC of Crawford County and the City of Meadville. The project transforms a vacant lot from a blighted property into a vibrant community venue that will provide arts, culture, and wellness activities while fostering an inclusive community.
- 2016/17 *The Spirit of Birches, Birds and Words*, Meadville, PA. Public Mural at Meadville Medical Center’s Medical Arts Building. 765 Liberty Street. Designed and painted in collaboration two Allegheny College students and several alums. Mural intended to create a pleasant, contemplative space for patients as they transition from the parking lot to the entrance of the hospital/offices.
- 2014/17 *Fostering Livability through Art, Nature and Culture*, Conneaut Lake, PA. National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant approved 2014 and culminated in 2017. Outcomes: development of public art trail plan from Ice House Park to Fireman’s Beach; development of a web-app tour series for historically important sites in Conneaut Lake; fabrication and installation of one permanent public art sculpture (life-size woolly mammoth) at Fireman’s Beach. Four community arts engagement events were held to gather local stories and provide input in planning and design.
- 2015 *The Bus Stops Here: Asbury Manor Bus Shelter Project*, Fifth Ward, Meadville, PA. Project
- 2013 *Blue Box Renaissance*. A community collaboration that involves transforming newspaper distribution racks into functional works of art. (2011 – 2013)
Fostering Livability through Art, Nature and Culture, Conneaut Lake, PA. Preliminary

- research and planning; first submittal for NEA Our Town Grant.
- 2012 *Poetry Park*. Erie, PA. A commission for the Trinity Square Foundation. Project included design and fabrication of eight large sculptural forms installed in the Poetry Park, including a Proscenium Arch form for the poetry stage. Phase I of project included a community collaboration for a pathway painting through the park.
Blue Box Renaissance. A community collaboration that involves transforming newspaper distribution racks into functional works of art.
- 2011 *Shadybrook Park Revitalization*. A collaboration with the City of Meadville that led to revitalization of a community park through murals, trail development, and stormwater enhancements designed to address flooding, increase usability of the park and also improve water quality in Mill Run.
Blue Box Renaissance. A community collaboration that involves transforming newspaper distribution racks into functional works of art.
- 2010 *Mill Run Stream Highlighting*. A collaboration with the City of Meadville to highlight Mill Run, a historically important yet impaired urban stream that moves through the city, and encompasses much of the central downtown business district. The project involves a series of street paintings implemented at each place where the stream runs under a city street.
- 2009 *North Street Improvement Project*. A collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the City of Meadville to foster enhancements of the North Street Improvement project, which includes expansion of turning radii at four major intersections. The plan features development of a ‘green necklace’ to enhance stormwater management, establish bio-infiltration and/or bio-retention sites for improved water quality along the street, which is adjacent to Mill Run (an impaired urban stream), and integrate community art along the corridor. Construction for Phase I began in 2013.
- 2007 *In Praise of Land & Water: Revisioning Stormwater on Federal Highways*. An ecoart project that merges Earth Art with best management practices in the environmental mitigation of stormwater runoff as part of the I-79 Meadville Interchange Project with PennDOT and Federal Highway Administration. A collaboration with artists Amara Geffen and Angelo Ciotti, Environmental Engineer Steve Halmi, and Landscape Architect Chris Brown (Derck & Edson).
Market Square Stormwater Garden. An eco-art site project that demonstrates reuse, addresses flooding from stormwater overflow, and creates civic space.
Flow: Mill Run. A signart relief mural on a municipal parking garage in Downtown Meadville, where Mill Run, an historical stream, runs under the structure on its course through the city of Meadville. This project is part of a larger effort to highlight and daylight Mill Run throughout the city and in so doing to help stimulate sustainability and economic development.
- 2005 *Market Alley*. Design concept for beautification and greening of an alley in Meadville’s historic downtown. Project involved daylighting a local stream the flowed under the alleyway. Phase I was completed December 2011.
- 2002 *Read Between the Signs*. A sculptural relief made from recycled road signs that screens PennDOT’s storage lot in Meadville, PA. Collaboration with PennDOT. Phase II and III were completed with support from the Mid-Atlantic Arts Grants. Summers from 2002 – 2010.
- 2001 *Signs & Flowers*. A sculptural installation of twelve large (8 – 10’) flowers made from recycled road signs. Project involved landscaping a 315’ x 80’ embankment into a series of undulating mounds (made from recycled shoulder dirt), which together with the flowers evokes a post-industrial garden. Collaboration with Allegheny College and PennDOT in Meadville.
- 2000 *Greenroom*. A ‘green’ community breakroom designed for the Crawford County Industrial Park. Meadville, PA. Includes a 33’ x 17’ mural, historical photo-essay, sculptural tables and chairs all made from recycled materials found on site.

Selected Recent Exhibitions (2000 – 2023)

- 2023 IN-FILL PA. An exhibition of designs from around the world that provided models of projects that transform blighted or derelict lots. The exhibit was intended to inspire projects in Susquehanna Valley. See:
https://www.exchangearts.org/_files/ugd/e99b55_aaa5a20312b04a43be25e2623b735c71.pdf
- 2022 SPARKS! Places of Innovation. Museum on Main Street. Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition. Currently travelling to a number of rural communities across the US.
- 2021 *Shapes From Out of Nowhere: Ceramics from the Robert Ellison Jr Collection*, Metropolitan Museum of Art. February 22 – August 29, 2021. The entire collection is now part of the Met’s Permanent Art Collection.
- 2014 *Reused, Reclaimed, Repurposed*, Mercyhurst College, Erie, PA
Combat Paper, Allegheny College Art Galleries, Meadville, PA
8-Hour Projects, Allegheny College Art Galleries, Meadville, PA
- 2013 *Sustaining Systems*, Locus Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA (in conjunction with Americans for the Arts Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, PA)
- 2012 *Remediate-Revision, Public Artists Engaging the Environment*, St. Mary’s College, Maryland
- 2006 *Outside the Centers/On the Edge*, a juried exhibit that travelled to five PA sites
- 2005 *Artist’s Who Teach*, Manchester Craftsman Guild, Pittsburgh, PA
- 2004 Outdoor Sculpture Show, Red Brick Gallery, Foxburg, PA, November.
- 2003 Erie Art Museum, *Environmental Art Exhibit*, March
Bowman, Penelec and Megahan Galleries, Allegheny College, Faculty Exhibit, October
- 2002 Bowman, Penelec and Megahan Galleries, Allegheny College, Faculty Exhibit, October
Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA, Outdoor Installations, Spring
- 2001 Archie Bray Foundation 50th Anniversary Auction/Exhibition, Summer
Community Prayer Project. Bowman, Penelec and Megahan Galleries, Allegheny College, Outdoor Sculpture Show, Red Brick Gallery, Foxburg, PA, November.
- 2000 Glass Growers Gallery, Erie, Pa, Summer.

Grants and Awards

- 2023 American Planning Association (APA-PA) Great Place/Great Transformation award for The Arc Community Greenspace
- 2020/24 DCNR Grant with the City of Meadville (for The ARC Community Greenspace project)
- 2020 Heart & Soul Mini-grant, (for *Bloom Where You’re Planted*)
PA Council on the Arts, Project Stream mini-grant (for *Bloom Where You’re Planted*)
- 2019/23 Creative Communities Grant, PA Council on the Arts (with The ARC of Crawford County)
- 2016 Named the Eila V. Bush Endowed Chair of Art, Art Department, Allegheny College.
- 2014 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town Grant, Conneaut Lake Borough
Raymond P. Shafer Award for Outstanding Community Service
- 2011 PA Route 6 Alliance Heritage Partnership Award for Excellence
- 2010 Diamond Honor Award “*In Praise of Land & Water: Revisioning Stormwater (179 project)*”
- 2005 Western Pennsylvania Environmental Award, for Art & Environment Initiative
- 2005 French Creek Project Environmental Award, for Art & Environment Initiative
- 2003/4 Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. Artists & Communities. PennDOT SignArt projects
- 2002/4 Humanities Teacher/Scholar, Allegheny College
- 1992 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Visual Artists Fellowship
- 1986 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Visual Artists Fellowship

Selected Lectures and Conference Presentations

- 2022 CAA Conference, NYC, “Ecofeminism and Ecoart: Moving from Rage to Healing”
CAA Conference, NYC, “Resilience and Transdisciplinarity in Ecoart Since 1999”
WEAD, Art & Activism Series, “Celebrating the Local: 25 Years of Placemaking in Northwest Pennsylvania (zoom presentation), April.

- 2017 Community presentations in conjunction with *The ARC Community Greenspace* project
- 2015 FATE conference, Indianapolis, IN; March 2015. Presentation: *Primary Source: The College Art Gallery as Educational Tool*
- 2013 Americans for the Arts Annual Conference, Locus Gallery presentation on A&EI projects
- 2012 Artists in Context: Art and Community and Environmental Change, St. Mary's College, St. Mary's City, Maryland
- 2011 Imagining America Annual Conference, Community-based Public & Environmental Art
- 2010 Bates College Arts Summit: Strategies for Community-based Arts
Lawrence University, *Spoerl Lecture*, "The Arts & Sustainable Community Design"
Biennial Art Educator's Conference on Art, Education and Social Justice; Edinboro University
- 2009 Imagining America, "Stories from the Field: Arts-based community development"
- 2008 National Council on the Education of the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) annual conference.
Presentation focused on Community Arts projects and was published in the Annual NCECA Journal. Co-authored with Susan Wink.
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of PA (AICUP) - regional meeting at Seton Hill University presentation on CEEDs work, with special focus applied liberal arts learning and community engagement/development initiatives.
Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Education annual conference, February 2008. I was invited to do a presentation on the CEED, the Arts & Environment Initiative and the Mill Run Project at this annual meeting of PA Environmental Educators.
Bonner Service Learning Conference held at Allegheny in the summer. Presentation on Civic Engagement Programs at Allegheny College.
Project Pericles Annual Meeting (Occidental and Pitzer College's). Presentation on "Civic Engagement, Curriculum, Community: Creating Connections at Allegheny College".
Discussion leader for session that focused on the challenges and opportunities for engaging faculty in teaching for civic engagement.
- 2006 "Reuse and Community Building: Roadside Art in Meadville, PA". Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Summit, Harrisburg, PA., September
- 2004 "Creating Partnerships: CEED and Arts & Environment Initiative", presented at HUD's Community Outreach Partnerships Center conference in Chicago
- 2005 "Art as a Tool for Community Development", Art, Culture Nature, Bothell, WA. '

Reviews, Articles & Interviews

- New York Times*, *Review of Shapes From Out of Nowhere*, "Looking at Clay from All Angles," June 2021
- Lincoln Electric ARC Magazine*, "A Mammoth-Sized Sculpture", March 2017
- Erie Times Visual Arts Review*, "Found Art Show a Real Find", December 2013, *Reused, Reclaimed, Repurposed* at Mercyhurst University
- Erie Times OurView*, "Poetry Park Project featured in article on Erie's Comeback: focus on violence, poverty and education February 2013
- Keystone Edge (online magazine)*, "Meadville Makeover: Public Art Drives Economic Growth", Marty Levine, August 2012
- Crawford County Magazine* "Road Art", article by Roberta Levine, January-February 2010
- Imagining America Fall Newsletter* "Keyword: Interdisciplinary," Interview with Kevin Bott, 2010
- Public Art Review*, news-brief on Arts & Environment Initiative, summer 2006.
- The Post-Journal*, "Creative Solutions", Loren Kent, July 14, 2006.
- Ar'te-fact*. "Roadside, Road Sign Art". Sam Hossler. Fall 2005 Volume V, Issue IV.
- Meadville Tribune*, *Erie Times*, *Philadelphia Enquirer* all have reported on Art & Environment projects.
- American Ceramics*, Winter 1992, "A New Body Language: The Primacy of Touch In Amara Geffen's Clay Sculptures". C. Wellman
- Ceramics Monthly*, May 1989 (feature article)

Visiting Artist and Residency Experience

- 2016 Archie Bray Foundation, artist participant in commemorative mosaic project. Helena, MT.
- 2011 Bates College, Maine, Consultant for strengthening Art Programs at Bates
- 2012 St. Mary's College, Maryland, Visiting Artist in connection with *Remediate-Revision, Public Artists Engaging the Environment*
- 2000/9 Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Artist-in-Residence (summers annually)
- 1990 Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, Mt., Artist-in-Residence (Jan-April)
- 1991 Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, Mt., Artist-in-Residence (summer)
- 1990 University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mi., Visiting Artist, May and June
- 1989 Watershed Center For Ceramic Art, North Edgecome, Me., Artist-in-Residence, Summer

Teaching Experience

- 1997 – 2018 Professor of Art, Allegheny College (retired 2018)
- 1989 – 1997 Associate Professor of Art, Allegheny College
- 1986 – 1989 Assistant Professor of Art, Allegheny College
- 1982- 1986 Instructor of Art, Allegheny College
- 1979 – 1982 Instructor of Art, Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana

Additional Institutional Service/Appointments

- 2016-17 Faculty Chair Diversity Innovation Fund
- 2015 - 17 Committee on Diversity & Equity (CoDE)
- 2012 – 2015 Ad Hoc Civic Engagement Committee
- 2012 Co-chaired and co-authored Civic Engagement Task Force Report (summer/fall)
- 2007 – 2009 Primary Investigator for *Core Commitments Program for Personal & Social Responsibility*, an AAC&U program (first AAC&U endeavor for Allegheny)
- 2008 – 2010 Public Events Committee (facilitated process for Annual Theme)
- 2007 - 2012 College Representative/Liaison for Project Pericles, AACU Core Commitments Program
- 2007 – present College Representative/Liaison for Imagining America
- 2006 – 2008 Task Force for Environmental Responsibility (TER – appointed by Richard Cook)
- 2005 – 2011 Director, Center for Economic and Environmental Development and Chair Allegheny College Civic Engagement Council
- 1997 – 2004 Art Department Chairperson
- 1993 – 1995 Faculty Review Committee
- 1990 – present Curatorial Planning for Bowman, Penelec and Megahan Galleries
- 1990 – 1993 Curriculum Committee (Chair of Committee 1991 – 1993)
- 1987 – 1989 Faculty Development Committee