

mitigating youth violence

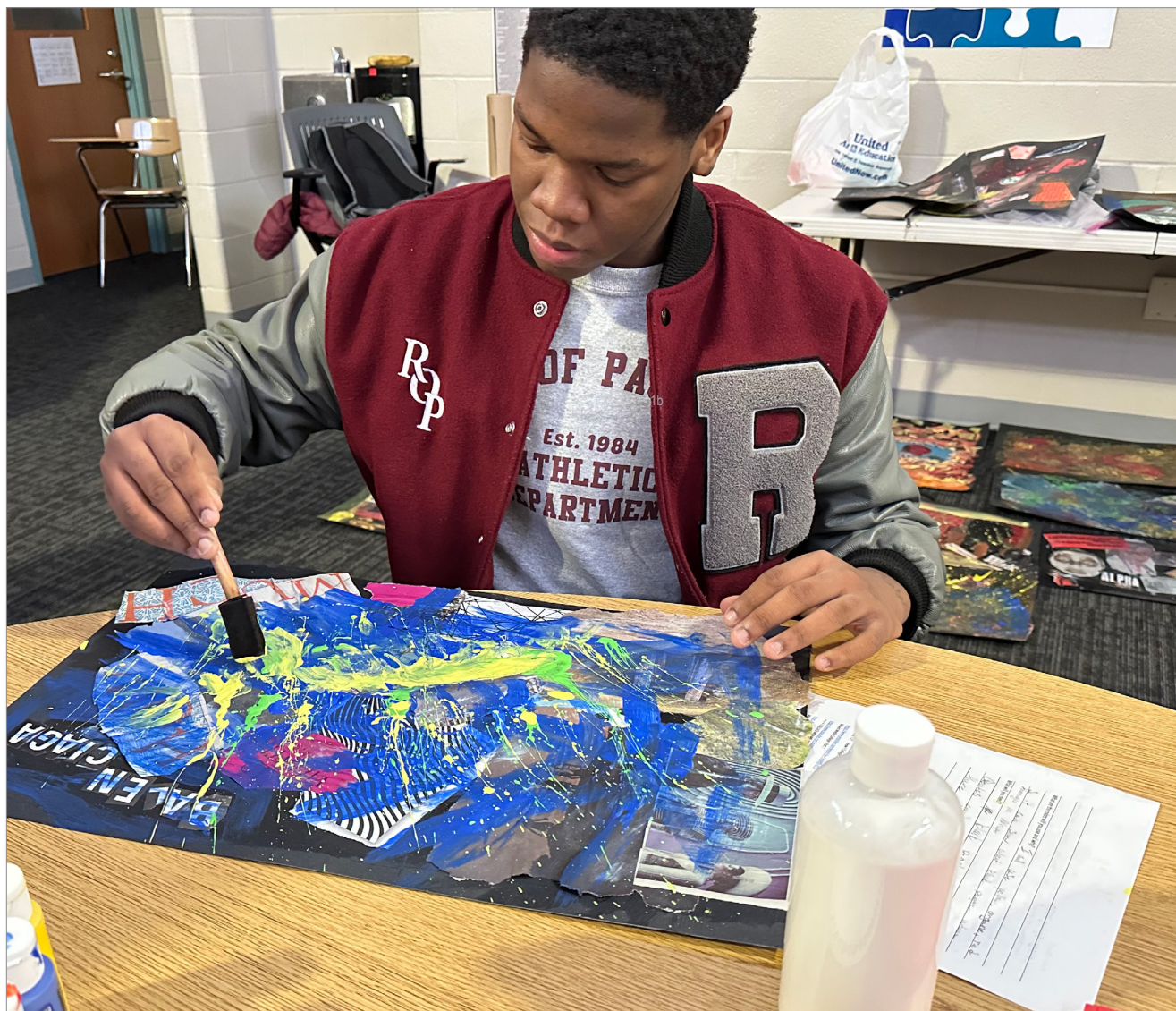
the futuring project: audacious narratives & enduring voices

Neeta Verma
researcher, designer, educator

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This design initiative addresses the systemic issue of youth violence by focusing on its underlying causes. The project is the design, development, and implementation of an arts enrichment program that helps mitigate youth violence and fosters community healing. Recognizing that youth violence affects not only families but also erodes the social fabric of communities, this initiative emphasizes the critical importance of caring for our youth as a determinant of the future health and resilience of our communities.

What makes this project unique is its use of an arts enrichment programming for recovery, transformation, and reclamation—aimed at empowering youth and promoting nurturing environments.



1a



1b



1c



1d

Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices

The Futuring Project: Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices is an arts enrichment program that combines art and design instruction with a goal to provide youth caught at the center of the crisis—a voice and a chance to create and own their personal (audacious) narratives. It addresses the problem of youth violence in South Bend, IN. The design intervention showcased here is work from the arts enrichment program that was implemented at a detention facility serving at-risk youth who had been exposed to violence, ages 14-22.

Participants used art and design as healing and therapy, the arts programming provided youth with a rich space for self-expression, self-reflection, and engagement through their art and design projects. In addition, the program also skilled them with proficiencies at the intersection of art, design, and technology. The programming units included collage, painting, music composition, drawing, digital design, choreography, and a capstone at the end of the program that pulls these proficiencies together.

1A: Participants at the collage workshop

1B: Participant at the painting workshop

1C: Participants collaborating during the music composition class

1D: Self-portrait in charcoal and pencil by one of the participants



“I made this painting to relax my mind and stay calm...also, to take my mind off of being locked up and to think about my family...”

— painting & words by SA Foster, participant



“In making this collage I thought about me and my incarcerated friends and how we can be seen as better people...I tried to be abstract....”

— collage and words by SA Ramirez, participant

Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices

Painting and Collage Workshops: The exercises on the left are from two of the selected workshops, the *Painting and Collage Workshops* respectively. The hands-on exercises promote emotional expression, push creativity and imagination, and provide a therapeutic outlet to process emotions like joy, sadness, anger, and anxiety when tearing, cutting, reformatting materials for collage and paint.

Each exercise followed a 3-step process of planning, making, and reflection. Examples of a painting and a collage from the workshops are shown on the left (1A) and right (1B) respectively. They are accompanied by thoughtful reflections that students penned after finishing their pieces.



Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices

The Mask-Making Project: The mask-making project is the capstone project where participants embark on a creative journey, beginning with reflective writing to channel personal experiences and stories into powerful narratives, using masks as their medium. These introspective pieces delve into the interpretation of the self at the intersection of *culture and identity*—exploring how these elements shape the participants' understanding of themselves and their connection to their cultural legacies. Each mask embodies the individual: carefully conceived, translated, and crafted by young hands through the use of color, texture, patterns, motifs, and marks to mold artifacts that transcend the iconic, symbolizing a reconstructed self. Materials, shapes, and contours are contemporaneously purposed to capture not only the present moments of these young lives but also seamlessly connect them to their histories, past, and their present.

1A: *The PI working with one of the participants at the mask-making workshop*

1B & C: *Participants finishing their masks*

1D: *A participant presenting and sharing his work during the workshop*

AUDACIOUS NARRATIVES ENDURING VOICES

September 22–November 12, 2023



THE SOUTH BEND
MUSEUM of ART

1a

AUDACIOUS NARRATIVES ENDURING VOICES

September 22–November 12, 2023



THE SOUTH BEND
MUSEUM of ART

1b

AUDACIOUS NARRATIVES ENDURING VOICES

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THE SOUTH BEND
MUSEUM of ART

1c

Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices: An exhibit at the South Bend Museum of Art

September 2023 - November 2023

Given the quality of work, in September 2023 the designed masks were selected for a dedicated exhibit by the South Bend Museum of Art. The work opened up not only the community but also youth from the city. On the left are promotional rack cards from the exhibit at the South Bend Museum of Art showcasing some of the work. The participants' poignant descriptions of their work, justifications, and reflections were printed on the back of the cards.

Corresponding reflections are below:

1A [FAR LEFT]:

My mask celebrates and describes the Día de Los Reyes (Three Kings' Day) from Mexico. It represents the Aztec traditions and the faith we have in God. I have used orange which is a big part of this celebration.

by Alan Ledzema, participant & artist

1B [MIDDLE]:

My mask is about emotion, about happiness, about madness that possesses us... it shows how someone can feel all that and without saying a word and show how they feel about the things in the world.

by Nicholas Granado, participant & artist

1C [RIGHT]:

My mask represents my culture. I used dreads to describe the African experience in how wearing dreads not only defines us but also labels us in ways that are unfair, biased, and discriminatory.

by J'Shon McIntosh, participant & artist



1a



1b



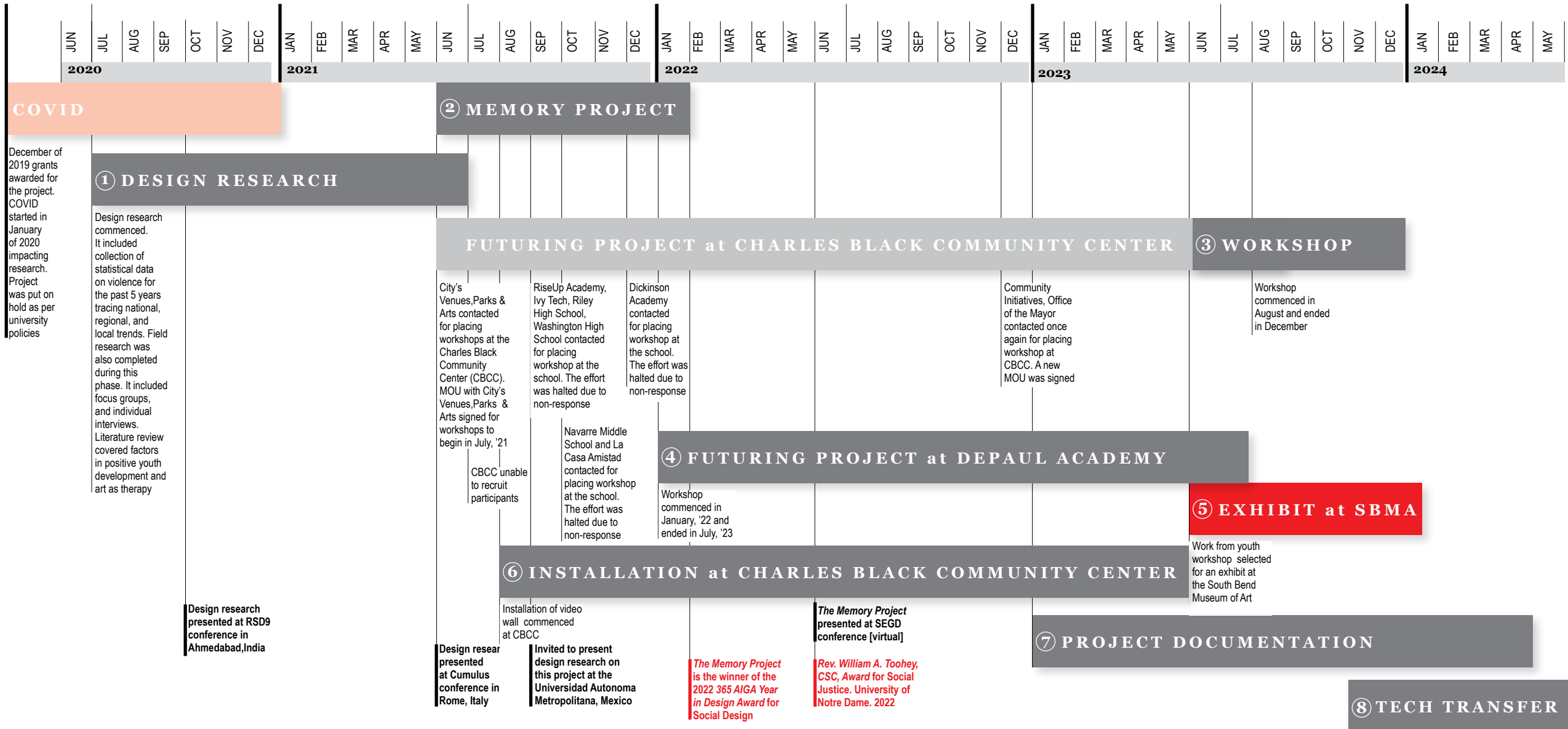
1c

Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices: An exhibit at the South Bend Museum of Art

September 2023- November 2023

Opening night of the exhibit at *Audacious Narratives & Enduring Voices* at the South Bend Museum of Art where the participants from the detention facility presented their work to the community. Showcased here are participants from the DePaul Academy arriving at the South Bend Museum of Art for the opening night and seeing their work on display for the first time (1A), one of the participants being interviewed about his process of mask-making and his experiences of the workshop (1B), students and staff from DePaul Academy looking at their work (1C).

project description | Neela Verma, researcher, designer, educator | mitigating youth violence and toxic narratives & enduring voices | January, 2025



December of 2019 grants awarded for the project. COVID started in January of 2020 impacting research. Project was put on hold as per university policies

1 DESIGN RESEARCH

Design research commenced. It included collection of statistical data on violence for the past 5 years tracing national, regional, and local trends. Field research was also completed during this phase. It included focus groups, and individual interviews. Literature review covered factors in positive youth development and art as therapy.

Design research presented at RSD9 conference in Ahmedabad, India

2 MEMORY PROJECT

City's Venues, Parks & Arts contacted for placing workshops at the Charles Black Community Center (CBCC). MOU with City's Venues, Parks & Arts signed for workshops to begin in July, '21.
RiseUp Academy, Ivy Tech, Riley High School, Washington High School contacted for placing workshop at the school. The effort was halted due to non-response.
Dickinson Academy contacted for placing workshop at the school. The effort was halted due to non-response.

Design research presented at Cumulus conference in Rome, Italy
Invited to present design research on this project at the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, Mexico

4 FUTURING PROJECT at DEPAUL ACADEMY

Workshop commenced in January, '22 and ended in July, '23.

The Memory Project is the winner of the 2022 365 AIGA Year In Design Award for Social Design

The Memory Project presented at SEGD conference [virtual]

Rev. William A. Toohey, CSC, Award for Social Justice. University of Notre Dame. 2022

3 WORKSHOP

Workshop commenced in August and ended in December.

5 EXHIBIT at SBMA

Work from youth workshop selected for an exhibit at the South Bend Museum of Art.

7 PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

8 TECH TRANSFER