Aurora Hughes Villa Named UAEA Art Educator of the Year

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Aurora Hughes Villa stands in front of Creativity Unbound, an exhibit of art by students in Cache Valley.

Hughes Villa is the founder of Art in Transit, a program that brings art by children to public places.

Aurora Hughes Villa, professional practice associate professor in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University, has been selected as the 2020-21 Utah Art Education Association (UAEA) Higher Education Art Educator of the year.

"This is a tremendous and well-deserved recognition of Aurora’s longstanding contributions to arts education in our elementary school systems," said Jamison Fargo, Interim Dean of the college. "Her efforts on behalf of our children have enriched their lives with greater confidence and creativity."

In addition to her role as professional practice associate professor, Hughes Villa is the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Endowed Program Director for Elementary Arts Education. She was formerly the District Arts Coordinator for Cache County School District, where she founded a program that brings art made by children into public places called Art in Transit: From Schools to Community. Hughes Villa received the Sorenson Legacy Award for Excellence in Arts Education for her work with Art in Transit.

Sylvia Read, Associate Dean for Teacher Education and professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership, expressed her appreciation for Hughes Villa’s work. “Aurora has more than earned this very meaningful recognition,” said Read. “The work she does with teachers and students enriches our communities across the state, and her efforts with the Caine College of the Arts prepare students to infuse the arts into their elementary classrooms.”

Rachel Nardo, dean of the Caine College of the Arts and former Beverley Taylor Sorenson Presidential Endowed Chair, echoed this praise for Hughes Villa. “Professor Villa has realized Beverley’s dream come true in providing excellence in integrated arts education for every child and teacher throughout Utah,” she said. “Her deep and stellar commitment to her artistic leadership practice, active engagement in the scholarship of teacher education, and innovative approaches to arts advocacy and community outreach define her unique and powerful contribution to the arts and education in Utah.”

Hughes Villa was formally recognized for the important work she does in Utah’s art classroom at the annual UAEA Conference on February 27th. Speaking about the theme of the conference, “Art Connects Us,” Hughes Villa said, “During the global pandemic, people are finding creative ways to make art accessible to keep people inspired during a stressful time. I feel that the arts are even more important than ever to help build community and keep us connected.”

Aurora Hughes Villa holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Ceramics and a Bachelor of Science in Art Education from Buffalo State College, as well as a Master of Fine Arts in Ceramics from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Prior to moving to Utah, Hughes Villa was a full-time art professor at North Central College in Illinois, where she taught sculpture and ceramics. She has taught art to children and adults for over 25 years. She is currently on the Utah Art Education Association Board and enjoys creating arts partnerships around the state.

Learn more about Arts Are Core, Utah State University’s Beverley Taylor Sorenson Endowed Program for Elementary Arts Education.