



STASH 3 Project Executive Summary

Stash 3 is an innovative arts initiative designed to foster a dialogue between artists and the community through material exchange and creative storytelling. This collaborative project, hosted by the Arts Council of Johnson County (ACJC) in partnership with social movement artist **Justin Border** was **supported by the Kansas Arts Commission and the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center**. Stash engaged **43 artists** of all experience levels from northeast Kansas, the Kansas City metro area, Ohio, Washington and Florida! Each participant

received a curated set of materials and used them to create an original artwork while responding to reflective questions about their creative process. The completed works were exhibited at the **Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center** in Overland Park, KS, culminating in a public **artist panel discussion** featuring both artists and mental health professionals.

Originally conceived by Border during the height of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, Stash 3 emerged as a response to both the pressure for artistic productivity and the need for a virtual creative community. The first and second projects initially engaged 45 artists combined through an open call, providing mailed materials and prompting them to explore their personal relationships with creative hoarding, inspiration, and artistic limitations. Building on this foundation, the **2023 iteration of Stash** expanded participation and transitioned the project into a physical exhibition, reinforcing the power of art as a tool for connection and resilience.

Artists were prompted to reflect on:

1. **Creative Energy:** Did this project spark new artistic inspiration?
2. **Community Connection:** Did participation foster a sense of belonging?
3. **Challenges & Rewards:** What aspects of the project were particularly difficult or rewarding?

Their responses accompanied the framed artworks as part of the exhibition, providing insight into their creative journeys. The **panel discussion** explored the intersection of art, mental health, and community, further emphasizing the role of artistic expression in navigating personal and collective experiences.

Through this collaboration, **Stash 3** successfully cultivated a shared artistic experience, bridging isolation with creativity and reinforcing the transformative impact of art on individuals and communities alike.

About the Arts Council of Johnson County

The Arts Council of Johnson County enhances the quality of life in Johnson County by strengthening the arts.

One of ACJC's core values is the belief that the arts are essential to the health and well-being of our community, strengthen our economy, and ensure an equitable quality of life. As arts and creativity provide opportunities for connection and continue to help (re)build our community after the last several years, we see the Stash 3 project specifically helping to achieve 3 goals:

- Facilitating connection and the exchange of ideas through artmaking.
- Providing a creative outlet through which our local community can process their experiences during the pandemic.
- Helping demonstrate the ability of artmaking to assist with community building and well-being. *Community building encompasses the creation or enhancement of community among individuals with a common need/interest.*

The STASH 3 project

In developing this program during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, social movement artist Justin Border was guided by a vision of connecting people through the arts. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Border Developed the Stash project as his answer both to feeling pressured to be productive and to create a virtual community during quarantine. Pulling from his own stash of materials, he shared an open call on social media for artists (of any experience level) to create artworks with materials mailed to them. To participate in the project, each artist had to use all the materials received within a singular work of their own. Any other medium within the participant's own personal supply stash could also be used with the project materials. The project was limited to the first 25 artists that responded. Participants were then asked to photograph or film their work, return the digital image(s)/video to Justin, and describe their personal experience with the materials they've collected, hoarded, coveted, or not.

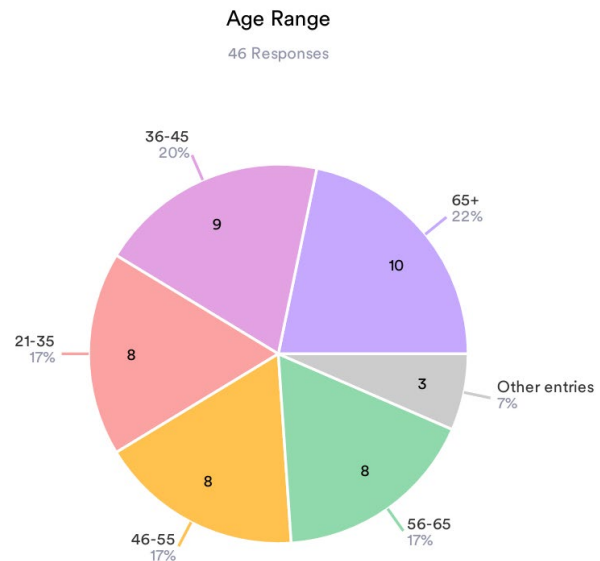
ACJC collaborated with Border for a new Stash 3 project in 2023, engaging up to 45 artists of any experience level, curating an in-person exhibit of Stash 3 artworks at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center in Overland Park, KS, and hosting a panel discussion with artists and mental health professionals. Materials were mailed to artists in addition to three questions: (1) Reflecting on your own experience with art making and your creativity while navigating the pandemic, have you found that this project has inspired an explosion

of creative energy? (2) By participating, do you feel connected or part of a community? (3) What is proving to be difficult or fantastic about this project? Artists sent us their answers along with their 2D, 8-1/2"x11" original artwork. Their answers were included in the object labels that accompanied their artwork which was part of the STASH 3 exhibition at the Johnson County Arts and Heritage Center. Additionally, ACJC and Border hosted a panel discussion with Stash 3 artists and local art therapists. The panel focused on artists' experiences during the pandemic and artmaking's role in wellbeing and mental health.

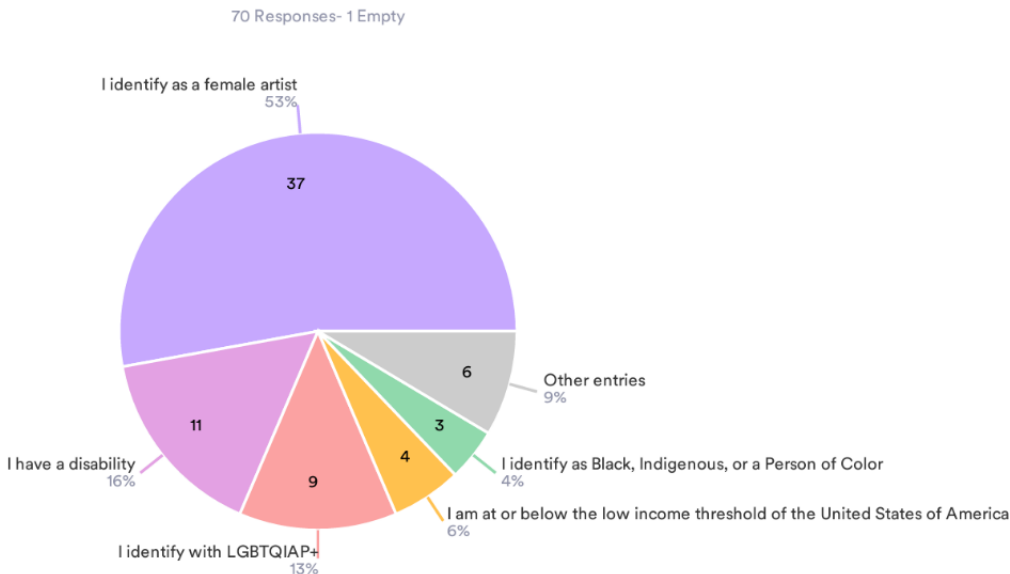
Summary of project findings – Participation Interest Form

Before participating in the STASH 3 project, creatives were asked to complete an interest form. The form asked them to share why they would like to participate in the STASH 3 project.

Total Responses: 46



Review the options below and select all that apply to you



Common Themes & Motivations:

- **Artistic Growth & Challenge** – Many respondents appreciate the opportunity to push their creativity with new materials and prompts.
- **Community & Collaboration** – Several participants expressed a desire to connect with other artists and be part of a larger creative network.
- **Sustainability & Found Objects** – Some artists are particularly drawn to working with reclaimed or salvaged materials.
- **Personal Enjoyment & Expression** – A number of responses highlight the joy of creating art as a hobby and the excitement of sharing their work.
- **Previous Stash Participation** – A few respondents mentioned they had participated in past iterations of Stash and found it inspiring.

Most Common Words:

- **Art, Project, Materials, Creativity, Community**

Sample Responses:

1. *"I find this whole idea intriguing and inspiring. I have worked hard for the last several years to meet and connect with more local artists, but I'm still missing that being-surrounded-with-artists life that I had in art school. I actually loved being isolated at home during the height of the pandemic and made some really great pieces then. I'm an introvert by nature, and find my day-to-day life somewhat exhausting. Send me materials and leave me alone to work--it sounds heavenly."*
2. *"Stash sounds like a great way to be involved in art & other artists!"*
3. *"My two-decade studio art practice is rooted in collage and assemblage of found or reclaimed objects. I thrive on the challenge of a prompt, chance operations, and material limitations. I love finding the poetry and connection of seemingly random combinations. I participated in Stash 2, and it proved to be the creative jumpstart I needed at that particular time. I find myself in a similar headspace currently and know the latest iteration of Stash would be a wonderful inspiration."*
4. *"I love the chance to get creative with materials and be inspired by something I might not normally use. I dabble in art as a hobby and there aren't many opportunities for me to share my art with others, so this sounds fun. I like seeing what others do with the same/similar materials."*
5. *"JCDS Emerging artists is interested in participating in the Stash 3 project because it is an opportunity to collaborate as a group! This is also a great opportunity for this artists' collective, comprised of artists with disabilities, to actively participate in the local arts community."*

STASH 3 participants were selected on a first come first served basis. Forty-three creatives from the Kansas City region and Northeast Kansas participated. They were each mailed a packet of materials which included bottle caps, pieces of sewing patterns, maps, pages from magazines, black matting (like shelf liner), printed paper, and textiles. Each participant received the same packet of materials. They were asked to use the materials (and even the envelope in which they were sent) plus items from their stash to create an original work of art. In addition to creating artwork, artists were asked to answer three questions:

- (1) Reflecting on your own experience with art making and your creativity while navigating the pandemic, have you found that this project has inspired an explosion of creative energy?
- (2) By participating, do you feel connected or part of a community?
- (3) What is proving to be difficult or fantastic about this project?

Artists' responses were included in the [Stash 3 exhibition](#). A summary is included:

Summary of STASH 3 Participation/Artwork Submission Survey Responses

Below is an overview of the key themes emerging from the three questions: *Have you found that this project has inspired an explosion of creative energy?; By participating, do you feel connected or part of a community?; What has proven to be difficult or fantastic about this project?*



JCDS Artists, STASH 3 2023

1. "Have you found that this project has inspired an explosion of creative energy?"

Burst of Inspiration:

Many respondents highlighted that the project acted as a catalyst for unleashing creative ideas, with several describing a sudden burst of inspiration that reinvigorated their artistic practices.

New Techniques & Experimentation:

Participants noted that the project encouraged them to experiment with new mediums, methods, and approaches, pushing them out of their comfort zones.

Renewed Motivation:

Several comments expressed that engaging with the project reconnected them to their creative passion, fueling a fresh wave of artistic exploration and productivity.

2. "By participating, do you feel connected or part of a community?"

1. A Strong Sense of Belonging

- Many participants expressed that this was one of the first times they truly felt part of a larger creative network.
- Several mentioned feeling *seen* and *valued* in a way they hadn't before in other art spaces.

2. Support and Encouragement

- Respondents appreciated the uplifting environment, noting how inspiring it was to see others' work and receive positive feedback.
- A few artists mentioned that having a shared purpose and going through similar creative challenges helped foster deep connections.

3. Diverse Artistic Voices Coming Together

- Some artists emphasized that the project brought together creatives from different backgrounds and disciplines, making it a unique space to share perspectives.
- There was a repeated theme of "I didn't feel alone in my process," highlighting how important this collective experience was.

4. Desire for More Interaction

- While most felt connected, a few mentioned wanting more structured opportunities to engage with other participants—like meetups, discussions, or collaborations.
- Some noted that while they loved seeing others' work, they wished there was an easier way to engage beyond the initial project.

Most Striking Quotes from Responses:

- *"This project made me feel like I was part of something bigger. It wasn't just about making art; it was about making connections."*
- *"Seeing what others created with the same materials made me feel like I was in conversation with them, even if we never met."*
- *"I normally create in isolation, but this project reminded me that I'm not alone in this creative journey."*

3. "What has proven to be difficult or fantastic about this project?"

• Fantastic Aspects:

- **Innovative Challenges:** Respondents enjoyed the creative challenges posed by the project, noting that these challenges led to unexpected breakthroughs in their work.

- **Resourcefulness:** Many found it fantastic how the project encouraged resourcefulness, whether through innovative use of materials or reimagining traditional art forms.
- **Community Support:** The sense of mutual encouragement and the exchange of ideas within the community were also frequently mentioned as highlights.
- **Difficult Aspects:**
 - **Logistical Hurdles:** A few artists mentioned that coordinating aspects such as material drop-off, deadlines, or aligning creative visions sometimes posed logistical challenges.
 - **Balancing Expectations:** Some expressed that balancing the project’s demands with their regular artistic practices could be challenging, especially when trying to meet self-imposed standards of creativity.
 - **Technical Constraints:** A handful of responses noted technical difficulties or limitations in accessing certain resources, which sometimes hindered their creative process.

Overall Insights

- **Creative Spark:** The project is largely seen as a powerful source of creative rejuvenation, inspiring participants to explore new artistic territories.
- **Community Connection:** The strong sense of community stands out as a key benefit, making artists feel more integrated and supported.
- **Balanced Experience:** While the creative energy and collaborative spirit were well received, some logistical and technical challenges remain areas for improvement.



Kelly Nagorka, STASH 3 2023

a

Sample Responses:

“I absolutely love creating art with found pieces. It's like you are not only creating art, but also similar to putting a puzzle together. How can i change the make up of this piece of trash or forgotten memo to create something inspiring? What will fit not only in the space where I'm trying to fill in but does it go with the overall look of this project? It's challenging but in a fun and creative way.”

“I feel so lucky to live in a community that not only values art from a variety of talents, but they support small local artists like myself. The fact that the Johnson county museum is showcasing local artists with a focus on environmental impact and sustainability, is everything a great community needs.”

“My biggest frustration was i wanted to create a larger piece. I also wanted to incorporate more of my personal Stash 3 in this artwork than i ended up doing. I didn't want to make my junk owl appear too junky with adding in random things that wouldn't be needed to get the idea across to the viewers.”

“This is my third time doing the Stash 3 project and I have found every time that the project gives me an explosion of creative energy. I really like the idea of receiving random things and having to make something of it because it challenges me to see things in a new light.”

“I definitely feel part of a community when participating in the Stash 3 project. Knowing that others are creating something out of similar supplies gets me excited for the end result of the project when we get to see what everyone made. The past few years have felt very isolating and for someone who struggles with depression, feelings of isolation can hit especially hard.”

“I think this project is a great analogy for life because you never really know what's going to come your way. You just have to figure it out in the moment and make choices as they come.. I think another fantastic part of this project has been the ability to sit in the moment and really focus on what I'm doing right now. This project is also a great exercise in problem solving...There's a kind of magic that happens with this project where ordinary objects like bottle caps or buttons become something extraordinary when you come up with a new way to use them.”

The STASH 3 exhibition opened from January – April 2024 at the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center in Overland Park, KS. **The Digital Exhibition Catalog can be viewed:** https://issuu.com/artsjoco/docs/Stash33_digital_catalogue.

On April 10th, ACJC and Justin Border hosted STASH 3: Out of the Box. Out of the Box included an art therapy-prompted art activity, an art panel with Stash 3 artists, and an artist talk by Tara Karaim. Inspired by the success of STASH 3 and our desire to continue offering programs that focus on building community, ACJC and Justin met with art therapists Kaley Wajcman and Melanie Arroyo to discuss how we might continue this important work. The result was a new community-based art program rooted in art therapy called Canvas Collective. Canvas Collective opened in September 2024. The Arts Council of Johnson County and Justin Border are grateful to the Kansas Arts Commission and the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center for supporting Stash 3.