

## **New STMA Project Helps Students Hitch Their Art to a Profitable Star**

When you think of a professional artist, do you imagine a poor, emaciated soul wasting away in a barren garret? Well think again! According to Artists in the Workforce, a recent report issued by the National Endowment for the Arts, "Nearly two million Americans say they are artists as their primary occupation." In addition, Arts and Cultural Tourism is the second largest industry in Georgia after agriculture and one of the top 10 reasons for business and residential relocation.

Inspired by this important information, the Steffen Thomas Museum's Arts Outreach Program© is offering **OP Art: Opportunities for Employment and Empowerment through the Visual Arts**. The three-year project, which will introduce students in the tri-county Lake Oconee area to careers in the visual arts, began this fall with a mixed group of 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders from Greene County High School.

Working professionals with a wide variety of experience, education and training will speak to the students about opportunities in careers related to the visual arts. Guest lecturers will include graphic artists, illustrators, interior and landscape designers, architects and fine artists. They will describe the numerous employment opportunities associated with the visual arts as well as the skills, experience and education necessary to qualify for these professions. Based on their first-hand experience, the speakers will also explain how to research job opportunities, apply for various positions, experience the creative process associated with these employment opportunities and help to design an education and employment strategy for interested students.

STMA hopes this project will evolve into an ongoing program incorporating a growing STMA database available to all students in the tri-county area providing information on local employment opportunities and job titles associated with the visual arts; scheduled presentations by representative of local businesses and higher education institutions offering degrees and training in the skills needed for these jobs; and a library of related material available to the public.

OP Art will contribute a valuable link in the in the employment chain that is the Georgia/Governor's Task Force Work Ready Economic Development Initiative, now adopted by Greene, Morgan and Putnam counties.

STMA is also offering workshops in the Greene County High School art classroom once a week for eight weeks during the fall semester beginning in October, and eight weeks in the spring semester after school. Under the direction of a STMA Arts Outreach Program© instructor, the students will design and build "recycled" sculptures made from discarded objects. By doing so, the young artists will realize the power of their very own ability to sustain the local environment and reduce our carbon footprint. This segment of the Op Art project will also illustrate visual art employment opportunities through the study

of the Georgian artist Steffen Thomas who trained as a stonemason in Nuremberg, Germany; graduated as a master sculptor from the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich; and supported himself and his family through public and private sculpture commissions.

Finally, a composite of the most outstanding student works will be constructed during the program's second semester. The resulting large public sculpture will be installed at Parks Ferry Recreation Area on Lake Oconee in the spring of 2009.

**Reynolds Plantation Foundation** presented a grant award for this project on September 23<sup>rd</sup> at a reception held at their Lake Oconee Community Organization Resource Center (CORC).

Students in Putnam and Morgan counties will participate in the second and third years of the project, respectively. The program will also be presented to the Morgan County CrossRoads School.

For more information, please contact the Steffen Thomas Museum of Art 4200 Bethany Road in Buckhead; 706-342-7557; [www.steffenthomas.org](http://www.steffenthomas.org).

The museum is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10 AM to 4 PM. Admission is \$5 adults, \$3 seniors and students; STMA members and children under six are admitted free.