

A MESSAGE FROM THE CURATOR

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Colorado-based artist Wes Sam-Bruce spent a month in residency at MASS MoCA to create a site-specific, interactive installation focusing on the theme of courage. His work acts as living metaphors to prompt physical engagement and character development with the viewer. Like entering another world, an abandoned home, a cavern system, or one's own inner life, his installations conjure strong emotional connections, empower self- and world-awareness, offer insight into the human condition, and enchant authentic and imaginative play in both adults and children.

Sam-Bruce is part artist, educator, designer, poet, social activist, and kid-at-heart, though affectionately we would add to his credits: "folk hero." His work has a distinct folk-like feel to it, with his use of repurposed and natural wood, and his earthy palette of blue and gold tones that form the intricate patterns in his paintings and constructions.

In addition to being a visual artist, Sam-Bruce is a folklorist. Like the mythical giant lumberjack Paul Bunyan, Cavernous tells a story about courage. Akin to Johnny Appleseed planting seeds throughout the country, Sam-Bruce's installation sows seeds of positive human characteristics. Through multiple mediums, including poetry, painting, and found object sculpture, the installation proposes challenges for acting with confidence and strength in our everyday life.

Cavernous is the third component of Kidspace's Art 4 Change, a four-year project that explores problem-solving through empathy, optimism, and courage. The guiding principle for these exhibition projects is Albert Einstein's statement that "[We] cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." In other words, without empathy, hope, and courage, societal problems can seem overwhelming. In an era of narcissism and cynicism, therefore, an experience with Sam-Bruce's work provides the opportunity to strengthen our collective sense of bravery, tolerance, and kindness.

—Laura Thompson. Ed D.
Director of Education and Curator of Kidspace



Wes Sam-Bruce grew up in Northern California and currently resides in Colorado. He is a graduate of Point Loma Nazarene University and is renowned for producing interactive and exploratory site-specific installations. He has previously exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, and the New Children's Museum San Diego.

Kidspace is MASS MoCA's child-centered art gallery and hands-on studio (ArtBar) presenting exhibitions and educational experiences in collaboration with leading artists. The ArtBar is available during the school year on weekends and school breaks, and is open every day over the summer.

CAVERNOUS: THE INNER LIFE OF COURAGE

On view beginning June 17, 2017

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MASS MoCA

1040 MASS MoCA Way
North Adams, MA 01247
413.MoCA.111
massmoca.org

KIDSPACE

CAVERNOUS THE INNER LIFE OF COURAGE WES SAM-BRUCE

MASS MoCA



A MESSAGE FROM THE ARTIST

You dear friend, are many things all at once:

YOU ARE A MOUNTAIN.

Drawing inspiration from the Hoosac Tunnel that runs through the mountains into North Adams, we have built a mountain in Kidspace. We have created a living metaphor and encourage you to immerse yourself in it. What will you uncover deep underground? What will you illuminate? Follow your curiosity. Follow intuitions. Breathe deeply. What will you find in the heart of the mountain and yourself today?

YOU ARE A GEODE.

A geode is a small stone that appears ordinary and insignificant from the outside, but, when cracked open, reveals a cluster of complex crystals inside. These crystals form patiently in the darkness for millions of years without being seen by anyone, but in one swift gesture that darkness can bloom open and unearth the beautiful crystals inside. What beautiful crystals will bloom from within you today?

YOU ARE A CRYSTAL.

Each crystal, like you, is dynamic and can be different from every angle, depending on how you hold it up to the light. One side can hold joy, while another side can hold sadness. Both can exist on the same crystal. These dynamic crystals live in the heart of that seemingly insignificant and regular stone. What are your different sides today?

YOU HAVE AN ESSENTIAL CENTER.

The root word of courage comes from the Latin word “cor,” which means heart; we have both a literal and metaphorical heart. To act with courage in its original context was to act from that central, innermost space, to act as your true self, to act with heart. The heart of something is its essence, its innermost space, its deepest and truest self. This is also where we get the modern word “core.” The earth has a core; apples have a core; you have a core. That core—or heart—is the essential center of a thing, and as is the case with an apple core, this is also where we get the seeds to make more apples. What seeds wait to grow from within you? It is a great act of courage to be your essential self, to grow, and to help create the world around and within you. It is also a great act of courage to recognize, listen to, and empower the essential selves of others. Great acts of courage are more often subtle and quiet than they are loud and heroic, but each act of courage must be newly uncovered in each unique life circumstance as it is needed. What does your courage look like? Who are you today when you act with courage?

YOU ARE A MOUNTAIN. YOU ARE A GEODE. YOU ARE A CRYSTAL.

You dear friend, are many things all at once.

There is a vast world around you, and a vast world waiting within you. This is your inner life. May your courage to explore these worlds around and within you increase. May your inner life bloom. May your universe expand. May your joy expand. May your attention to suffering expand. May you share what you find. May you become more aware of how your life affects the lives of others. May your life ask more questions than it answers. Be curious. Be confused. Be courageous. May you find mystery and poetry in everything.

—Wes Sam-Bruce