

Brothers' 'Scrollathon' teaches Miami-Dade students how to turn trash into art



[By: Christian Portilla](#)

Artists and brothers [Steven and William Ladd](#) live by three values: Spend your life doing what you love. Be focused and disciplined. Collaborate.

These are the values that have guided them since they were young on the path they are on today.

The brothers, originally from St. Louis, have gained fame in the art world for their handbag and couture accessories, but it's the pieces of scroll art they are teaching students to make that's generating a buzz.

In 2006, their childhood friend Angela Veninga invited them to a school where she was teaching special-needs students. They had an instant connection with the children and thought about involving at-risk, underserved communities with the restorative benefits of art.

That's when the **Scrollathon** was born. The brothers had received a donation of 10,000 belts and other materials from the nonoperational, Brooklyn-based Invisible Dog Belt and Buckle factory and explored ways to repurpose them. During a car ride, the older brother, Steven, began to roll the fabric together and the idea took off.



During the process, the brothers start by presenting their exhibit to the children while telling stories of childhood memories that inspired their collection. Then they teach the kids how to create scrolls by demonstrating the procedure, tightly rolling two pieces of belt fabric together until they resemble the shell of a snail.

The act creatively tests the participants' motor, visual and auditory skills.

Scrollathon is an educational outreach program geared toward students and the community. Through the process of collaboration, the brothers teach the students with positive motivational dialogue and encourage them to think about their memories and their values.



“What’s more important to us in our life has been identifying what our values are and living our lives by them,” Steven Ladd said. “And we realized that if you tell these kids about how our artistic practice evolved, that doesn’t mean as much to them as it does to start learning what values are, and to start identifying those in their lives.”

The entire process is documented on video, and photos of each student and their scroll and will be posted on the brothers' [website](#) once the project is completed.

The final collective piece will be unveiled at the museum, where it will be on public display.

It's the first time the Scrollathon has been hosted in Miami. The opening project included students from the W.J. Bryan Elementary Museums Magnet School, where kids from the Future Educators of America and Art Club participated. The students made two scrolls, one for display at the museum and another to name and keep as a memory of the project.



Vermelle Wright, a visual arts teacher, instructs second- through fifth-grade students at the school and was very pleased with the project. She said the lessons the children learned at the Scrollathon go in line with what they are teaching in elementary education.

“The students are always excited to have some time away from the classroom, so that was a plus and then the artists were excited about what they did. I think the colors, the shapes, the textures — [students] were really affected by them,” Wright said. “I also liked that everything the artists were saying, I was teaching them. So they saw that it wasn’t just something that came from a book or that we’re doing in class, but that it’s valid for the life of an artist and the process that artists go through. I loved that part.”

Now through March 4, the brothers will be hosting Scrollathon events at the museum working with children from the Overtown Youth Center, Lotus House Shelter and other students from Miami-Dade Public Schools with as many as

1,000 students throughout Miami participating. The program is sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Aika Meleus, a fourth-grader, took part in the event and said she had a great time during the Scrollathon.

“It was fun scrolling, and it was fun to be creative. It was fun to see all the things they did. The color of my scroll was purple and colorful white. I called it Easter because it had colors on the outside and purple on the inside, which reminded me of Easter. I thought it was fun to collaborate with my friends,” she said, laughing.



The finalized collaborative work will include 1,300 contributors and scrolls in 24 boxes for display at the [MDC Museum of Art + Design](#) on the second floor of the Historic Freedom Tower, along with the brothers' Art Basel exhibit, *Mary Queen of the Universe*. Admission to all exhibitions and public programs is free and open to the public.

For the brothers, validation of their work comes from the feedback they receive from participants and their families, as well as the evolution they've experienced artistically, emotionally and spiritually since they started the Scrollathon.

“We're almost at the best time of our career right now. Like right now, we are living it. Right now, so many great things are happening that it's exponentially growing. Like on another level,” William Ladd said. “We just came back from Savannah. Before that, we were two days in New York. Before that, we were two weeks in St. Louis. It's like full-on performance, traveling around and doing Scrollathons across the country and museum shows. So it's just this massive amount of growth that's been happening around the last two years.”