

**DOWNTOWN MIA & SOUTH FL HEARTBEAT**

# Reused, Recycled, and Remembered: Collaboration with Steven and William Ladd

By: Sarah L. Mason

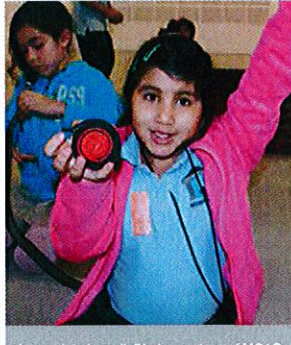
Nineteenth century painter and sculptor Edgar Degas once said, "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see." For brothers Steven and William Ladd, that concept rings true on many dimensions throughout their work. Their current exhibition, *Mary Queen of the Universe*, is an innovative installation now on display at the MDC Museum of Art + Design that is a testimony to Degas' conception not only because of its unique construction, backstory, and overall appearance, but also because of its place as the centerpiece of an inspirational children's program that they have used as a platform to share their art and vision with the world for many years.

The magnitude of *Mary Queen of the Universe* is defined in its scale, at approximately 10,000 square feet, its vast magnificence can be found in the intricacies, delicately and precisely placed to comprise the work. It includes over 150 objects, many composed of materials recycled from the Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn, where the Ladd siblings found a treasure trove of remnants from an old belt factory.

"We always loved the idea of using recycled materials: belts, buckles, old beads, trinkets, old factory bolts, and grommets; anything leftover and forgotten," said Steven. "It became an important part of our work, how all of the materials could be broken down and used in our art. When we first moved to New York, we didn't have any money, so we used recycled materials primarily because if we didn't use recycled materials, we weren't going to be using any materials at all. But, in the process of using

those materials, something shifted, and we started reaching out to people we love for materials, in the process learning the textile memories that are embedded in the objects themselves. The materials have meaning that adds to the story."

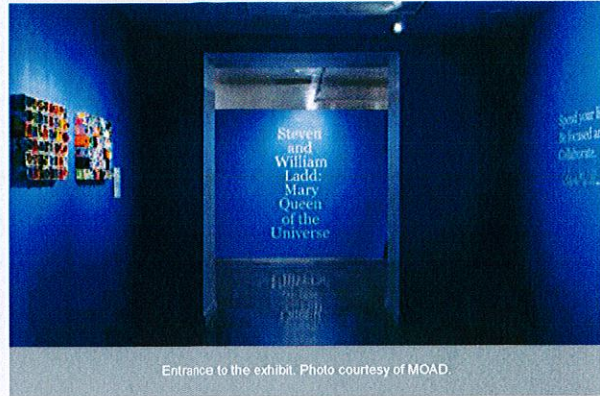
Now, the Ladd brothers' art is all in the fine trim, literally. They take trimmings from the used materials they have collected, roll those trimmings, creating different "scrolls." Often they fill handmade boxes with the scrolls, forming a "scroll landscape," a term describing meaningful



A completed scroll. Photo courtesy of MOAD.

materials arranged in a beautiful way.

*Mary Queen of the Universe* is a part of a larger collection of their work that developed from gathering their shared memories and using them as titles. For *MQU*, they used large landscapes to explore the idea of these memories. For example, one gallery features multiple large scale prints of ants because of a very early childhood memory the brothers share. They opened up red box they found, and an explosion of black carpenter ants start-



Entrance to the exhibit. Photo courtesy of MOAD.

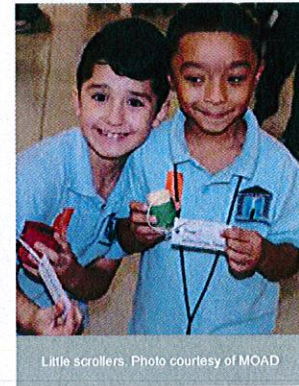
ed running around and poured out into the room. For Steven and William, the visual, emotional, and tactile experience remained imprinted in their minds as a vivid memory. They explored the idea by printing 116,000 ants on 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of paper.

This impressive installation (which the public may visit for free at the MDC Museum of Art + Design!) is tied to Scrollathon®, their engagement program which started when a friend and art teacher in St. Louis invited them to teach her students about their art. From the classroom, it snowballed into a two-week long event that 1,000 children get to take part in. And, when they introduced the idea of Scrollathon, it was their values they had in mind.

"Spend your life doing what you love. Be focused and disciplined. Collaborate ©," is the mantra that guides them. With Scrollathon, Steven and William work with local children, many of whom are underprivileged and may not otherwise

often be exposed to art. They teach the children how to make their own work of art. This provides them with experience not only with art but also ownership. They are able to create something they can take home. Then, they collaborate to make a larger work of art together while the Ladd brothers document the process and use the photographs (with permission, of course) on their website, giving the children involved the experience of being part of something larger.

"It's amazing that this started in 2006 at a workshop," said Steven. "It has been about sharing our core values since then.



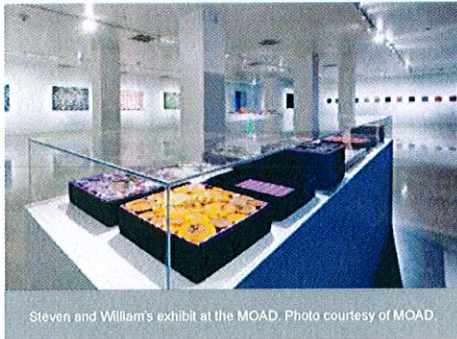
Little scrollers. Photo courtesy of MOAD.

Doing what you love, focusing, and discipline create a context of success—Scrollathon shifted from an object-based workshop to one of values."

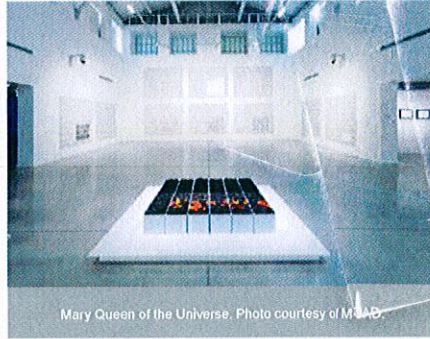
Steven and William also have an extensive body of work with drawings in colored pencil and ink and have been able to work with glass as well, some of which is featured in *Mary Queen of the Universe*.

Though the brothers have been working on art together for sixteen years, they both have a very independent relationship with their work, even the work they produce together. What one does, the other doesn't, and vice versa, then everything gets fused together in the final piece. They also reach out to other collaborators to help spread their ideas and produce something great together.

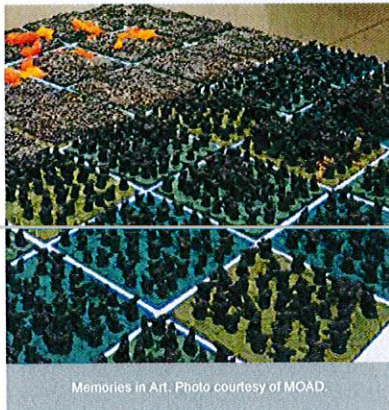
For more information about Steven and William, *Mary Queen of the Universe*, and Scrollathon, visit [stevenandwilliam.com](http://stevenandwilliam.com). Or, go straight to the source and visit the MDC Museum of Art + Design to see the collaborative, memory-infused installation for yourself.



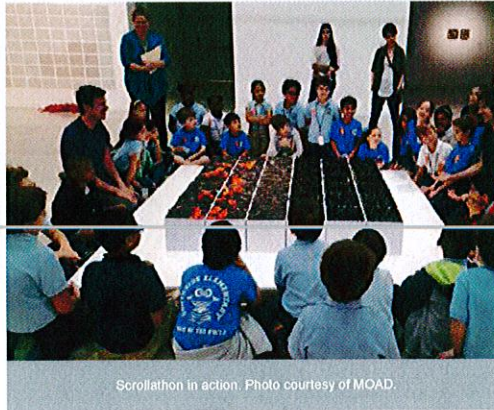
Steven and William's exhibit at the MOAD. Photo courtesy of MOAD.



Mary Queen of the Universe. Photo courtesy of MOAD.



Memories in Art. Photo courtesy of MOAD.



Scrollathon in action. Photo courtesy of MOAD.