



# Action Racket Theatre Re-Imagined

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*User-Centered Re-Design for Action Racket Theatre Web Site*

Prepared for Action Racket Theatre  
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# Action Racket Theatre Re-Imagined

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## Project Background

**Action Racket Theatre Re-Imagined** is a real-world project whose goals are to completely retrofit and redesign the existing website, [www.actionrackettheatre.com](http://www.actionrackettheatre.com). The existing site, designed by me in the early 2000s, uses outdated techniques that include table-based layout and framing. **Action Racket Theatre** wants to redesign, modernize and simplify the site. We believe the site will benefit from application of UX-based principles making for a more user-centered experience, and clearer communication of the company's philosophy and programming. One special step taken, given the real-world nature of this project was a questionnaire directed solely to the directors of **Action Racket Theatre**. The results from this questionnaire helped to pin down desired features, among which are the inclusion of video clips, audio clips and new photos showing interactions during performances and workshops. The resulting prototype will act as a flexible blueprint for re-design anticipated within the months to come.



### About Action Racket Theatre

**Action Racket Theatre**, founded by co-directors Lois Kagan Mingus and Joanie Fritz Zosike in 1998, conducts theatre workshops and performs at a large variety of venues in New York City. The workshops are aimed at toddlers, 'tweens, teens, adults and seniors and provide diverse communities, including people with disabilities, an outlet for their creative expression and social concerns. As stated by the company, its mission is:

*To make theatre born of the heart and mind that resides in the here and now; identifies and explores vital social issues; honestly represents its creators; inspires participants and audiences; is an accessible space for exploration with experienced and/or inexperienced actors of different ages and abilities; a theatre that touches a nerve and sees the humor and joy in all of it.*

This project takes on special personal significance to me because the founders of Action Racket Theatre are both long-time performing arts colleagues, and Joanie Fritz Zosike is my sister. Furthermore, I have guest-performed and taught with the company. The relevance and importance of the company to diverse New York City communities, however, cannot be overstated. Though there are other performing arts programs that address themselves to the needs of diverse age groups and communities, few, if any, in the New York City area provide programs that focus in on the social issues, needs and desires to the extent that Action Racket Theatre does. Their programming is, in fact, a case study in user experience design, in that the workshops they conduct start out by asking the participants about what burning issues they want to make a play. The end result is often a performance of this collective work where the participants take full ownership and a sense of empowerment in the act of creation. The performances, on the other hand are directly tailored to the communities they serve, addressing multi-lingual audiences, often in their native tongue.

## Comparative Analysis

Company	How They Compare	Page Screenshot
<b>Tada! Youth Theatre</b> <a href="http://www.tadatheater.com">http://www.tadatheater.com</a>	<p><b>Tada!</b> offers traditional musical theater training for children. Their very conventional presentation follows a formula that might be seen as Broadway cliché.</p> <p><b>Action Racket Theatre's</b> programming is inclusive of ages "3-103," as co-founder Joanie Fritz Zosike expressed it.</p> <p>Also, in contrast to <b>Tada!</b>, they teach and perform using experimental theatre techniques that address the social issues and desires important to their participants.</p> <p><b>Bad User Experience:</b>  Upon loading their web page, a Broadway-like song plays in a loop with no apparent means of stopping or muting it. The song ends only when one navigates to another page.</p>	
<b>Creative Alternatives of New York (CANY)</b> <a href="http://www.cany.org">http://www.cany.org</a>	<p><b>Creative Alternatives of New York</b> provides drama therapy services to people who have endured trauma in their lives. Like <b>Action Racket Theatre</b>, they address social issues for both children and adults. However, their focus is exclusively on trauma. They also provide drama therapy trainings.</p>	

## Company

### Dancing Dreams

<http://dancingdreams.org>

## How They Compare

**Action Racket Theatre** deals with many social issues and does not provide drama therapy, which is a specific technique not within the domain of their work.

**Dancing Dreams**, a New York-based company that offers dancing programs for young disabled girls. Their program addresses the desire of little girls to dance like ballerinas, despite their physical challenges.

Though **Action Racket Theatre** certainly addresses the hopes and desires of young people, and does sometimes include dance within performances, the focus of their work is a broader cross section of community.

## Page Screenshot



### Irondale Ensemble Project

<http://www.irondale.org>

**Irondale Ensemble Project** offers residencies at public schools throughout New York City, teaching their ensemble theatre techniques. A reputable company based in the tradition of ensemble, their offerings bear some similarities to **Action Racket Theatre**'s.

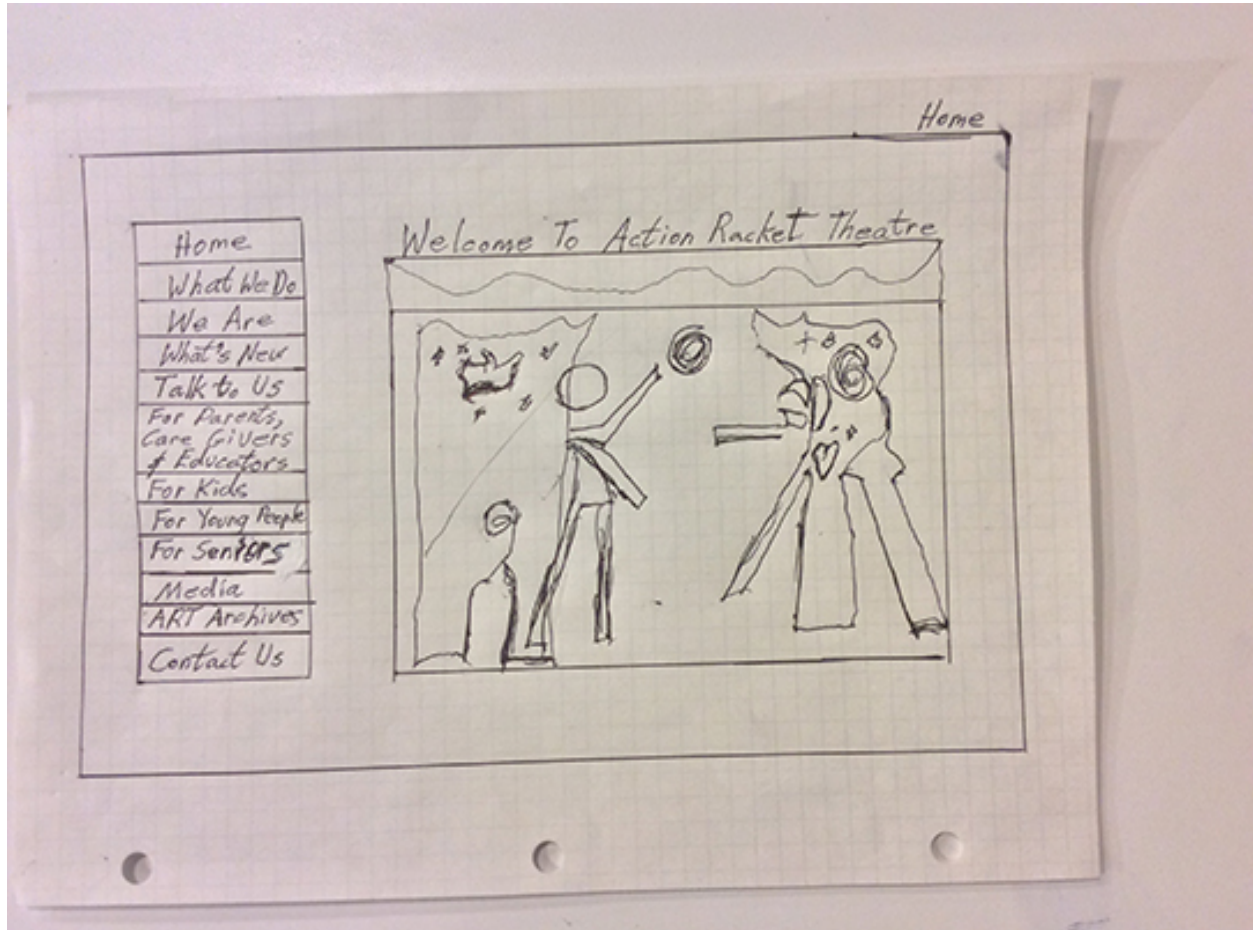
**Action Racket Theatre**, on the other hand, seeks a freedom in presentation of their material that would be curtailed by some of the restrictions placed on presenters in public schools.





## First Iteration Paper Prototype

Featured below is an early paper prototype sketch, reflecting ideas discussed with the directors, for the new site design:



**Home Page:** Reflects new page groups not on the current site, such as “For Parents, Caregivers & Educators.”

## User Surveys

Two sets of similar surveys were conducted for this project—one was addressed to my colleagues within the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering UX community. A second was addressed to colleagues and friends within the theatrical community. The questions were almost identical in these surveys except for the fact that those addressed to theatre friends, colleagues, and potential clients used language more appropriate to lay people.

### Survey Addressed to NYU Colleagues

There were 12 respondents to this survey, whose questions follow:

1. Looking at the site overall with an eye toward facelift and modernization, from what do you believe it would most benefit?
  - ☐ Visual Re-Design
  - ☐ Information Architecture Re-Design
  - ☐ Navigation Re-Design
  - ☐ All of the Above
2. What did you like the most about the existing site?
  - ☐ Action Racket Theatre Archives Page Group
  - ☐ What We Do Page Group
  - ☐ Other
3. What did you dislike most about the site?
  - ☐ Navigation
  - ☐ Information Architecture
  - ☐ Lack of What's New Page Group
  - ☐ Other

4. Would persistent navigational aids benefit the site?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
5. One proposed item for the new site is a page entitled Talk to Us. This will either be a guestbook type application or a blog. Do you believe this would enhance the interaction with the site's target audience?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
6. Here's your opportunity to speak your mind. Is there anything that you, as a visitor, would want to see added to this site, or do you believe anything is missing?

### Survey Addressed to Theatrical Colleagues

There were 9 respondents to this survey, whose questions follow:

1. Looking at the site overall with an eye toward facelift and modernization, from what do you believe it would most benefit?
- ☐ Redesign (change of look and feel)
- ☐ Reorganization/simplification of existing material
- ☐ Easier Navigation
- ☐ All of the Above
2. What did you like the most about the existing site?
- ☐ Action Racket Theatre logo
- ☐ Action Racket Theatre Archives
- ☐ What We Do
- ☐ Other

3.What did you like least about the existing site?

4.How easy is it to navigate our website?

☐ Very easy

☐ Moderately easy

☐ Not at all easy

5.We are considering adding either a blog or a guestbook where visitors can share their experiences and leave comments to enhance the interaction with our audience. Which of these would you prefer?

☐ Action Racket Theatre Blog

☐ Action Racket Theatre Guestbook

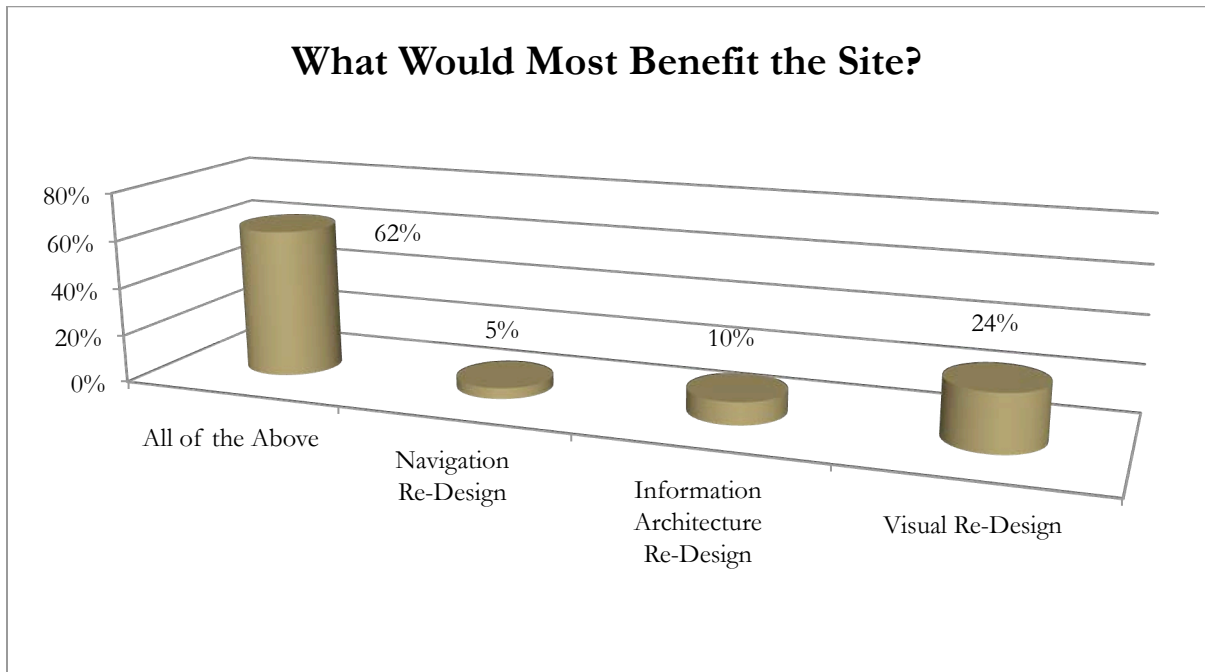
☐ Neither

6.Here's your opportunity to speak your mind. Is there anything that you, as a visitor, would want to see added to this site, or do you believe anything is missing?

## Survey Analysis

There are obvious crossovers between the two survey groups, such that aggregation of the data produces a survey sampling of 21 users. For the purposes of this analysis we will focus on the similarities and dominant themes that arose from the surveys. This data is both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

We begin with significant agreement on quantitative data on the next page.



Clearly, the overwhelming percentage of surveyed users agrees that improved navigation, information architecture re-design and visual design are all needed. The prototype for this project is aimed at improving all of these areas.

Following are a couple of significant qualitative quotations from surveyed users:

*The descriptions of the workshops offered are great, but photos and videos of how they really happen, including the wonderful storyteller/performances for children would be a great addition. The interaction that Joanie and Lois have with the audience is really special and I see none of this on the website itself.*

And another significant observation:

*The illustrations...are bright and cheery, but anonymous—chosen for safety, perhaps? I want to see photos—real people, whose presence will tell me*

*who and what this is all about...the badge of a group I  
want to be part of...*

These observations reveal that despite the fact that there are some photos on the existing site showing performance, they are not always compelling images, and there are too few images showing interaction between the directors and the workshop participants. Also quite significant is the complete lack of video clips current on the site. These are all issues that need addressing, and are at least partially approached in the current prototype.

## User Personas

Following are three user personas representing typical visitors of the site:

### Chao-xing, Single Mother/Graduate Student, 28 years old



Chao-xing is a busy single mother and graduate college student who juggles the priorities of taking care of her toddler daughter with her education and making a living.

Despite her extremely demanding schedule, she is determined that her daughter be exposed at an early age to the world of art, performance and education.

She often searches the World Wide Web, looking for programs that can spark the curiosity and creativity of a young child.

Image Credit:

<http://cdn.sheknows.com/articles/2013/04/working-mom-with-blackberry-and-baby.jpg>

**Darius, Senior Events Coordinator, Atria Riverdale**  
**Senior Living, 30 years old**



Darius is the Senior Events Coordinator at Atria Riverdale Senior Living, an assisted living facility in the Riverdale section of the Bronx. His job responsibilities include the planning of special events and booking of recreational and entertainment activities at the center.

He enjoys interacting with the residents of the center and is always looking for new and innovative programming that not only engages their minds, but also enlivens their spirit.

**Image Credit:**

[http://www.lungcanceralliance.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Kenny\\_Palmer-cut.jpg](http://www.lungcanceralliance.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Kenny_Palmer-cut.jpg)



## Keira, the Librarian/Curator, 27 years old



Keira works for the New York Public Library. Among her responsibilities are the preservation and organization of collections for young people and children.

She is also responsible for curating innovative artistically based programming, including theatrical workshops and performances aimed at empowering and educating youth.

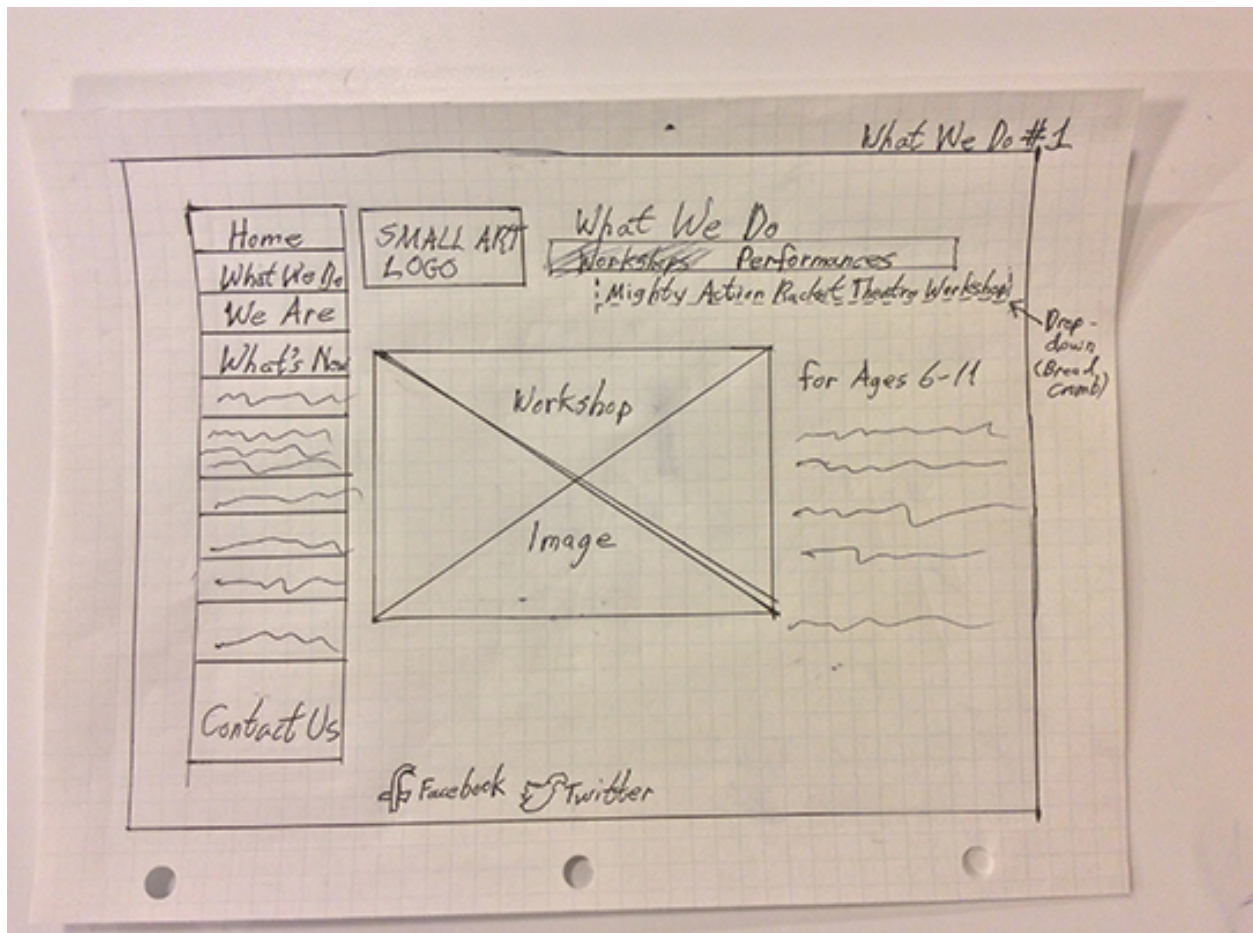
In her search for suitable programming, she often searches the Web, but has little time and needs to quickly determine if a company will be a good candidate for her to contact for booking.

### Image Credit:

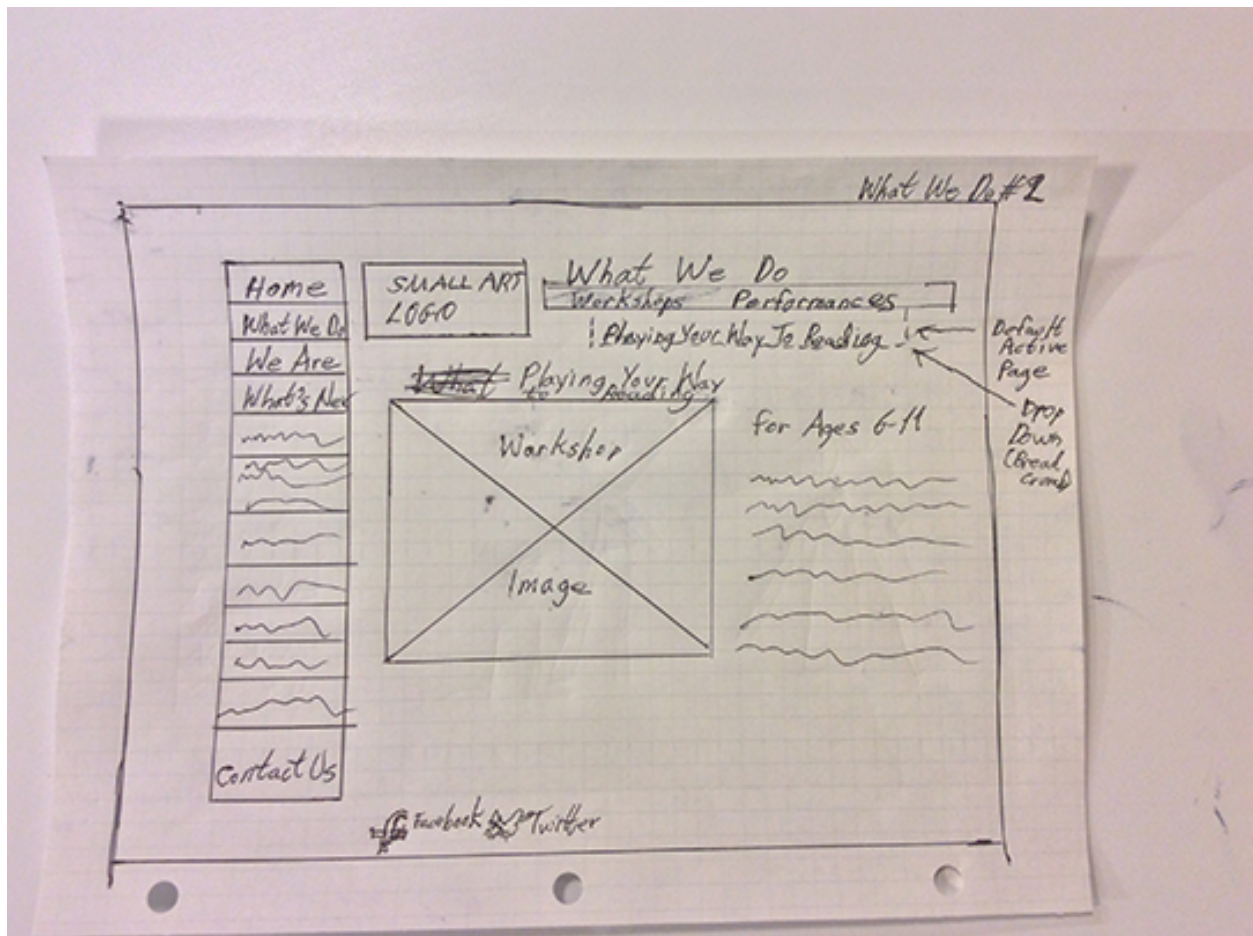
[http://woman.thenest.com/DM-Resize/photos.demandstudios.com/getty/article/76/223/200341971-001.jpg?w=600&h=600&keep\\_ratio=1](http://woman.thenest.com/DM-Resize/photos.demandstudios.com/getty/article/76/223/200341971-001.jpg?w=600&h=600&keep_ratio=1)

## Second Iteration Paper Prototypes

After sending out the first iteration paper prototype home page to the site owners for their evaluation, further discussion resulted in the following three additional paper prototypes of key segments of the site, as follows:

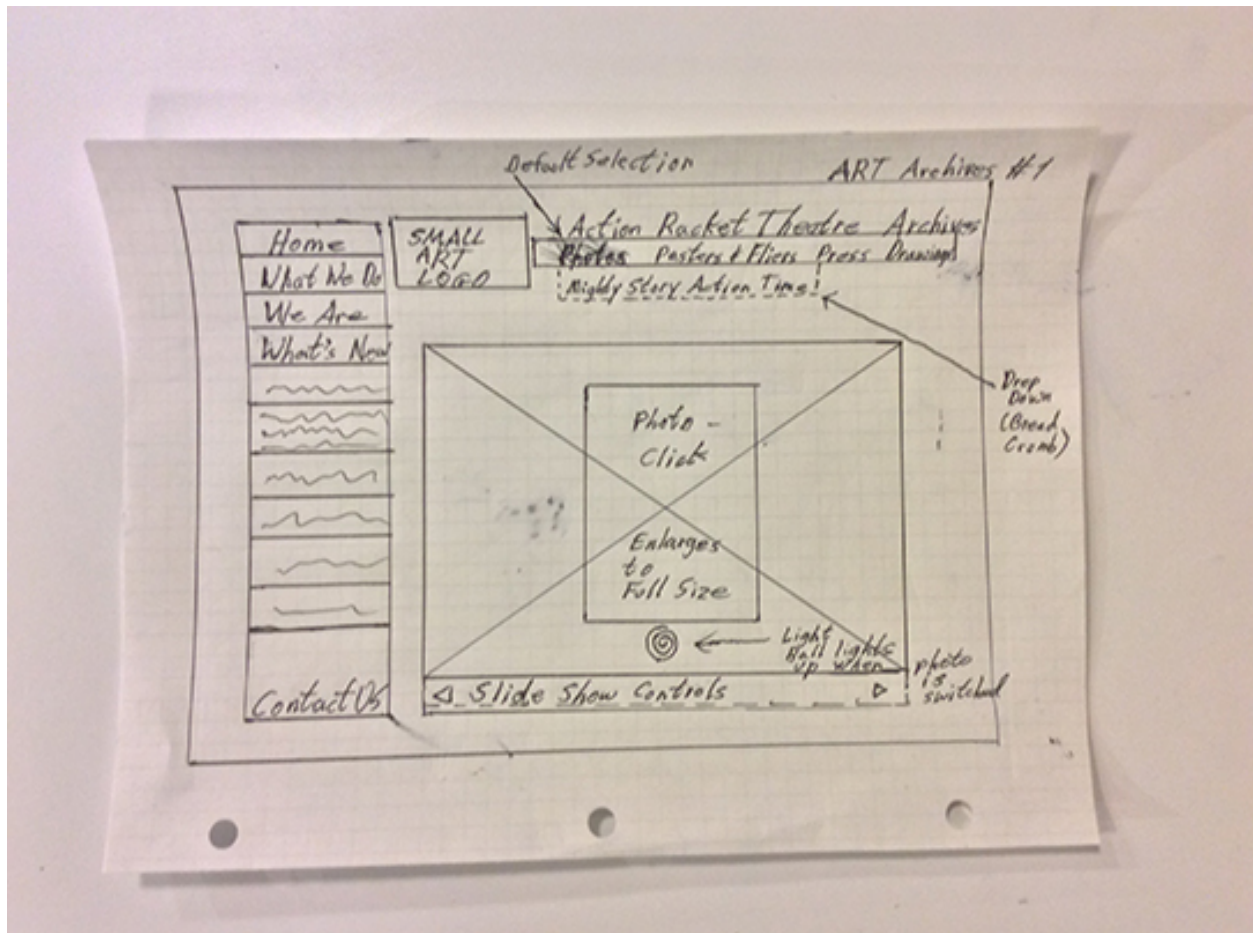


**What We Do:** Reflects new secondary horizontal navigation with dropdown menus.



What We Do: Another view showing workshop selection “Playing Your Way to Reading.”





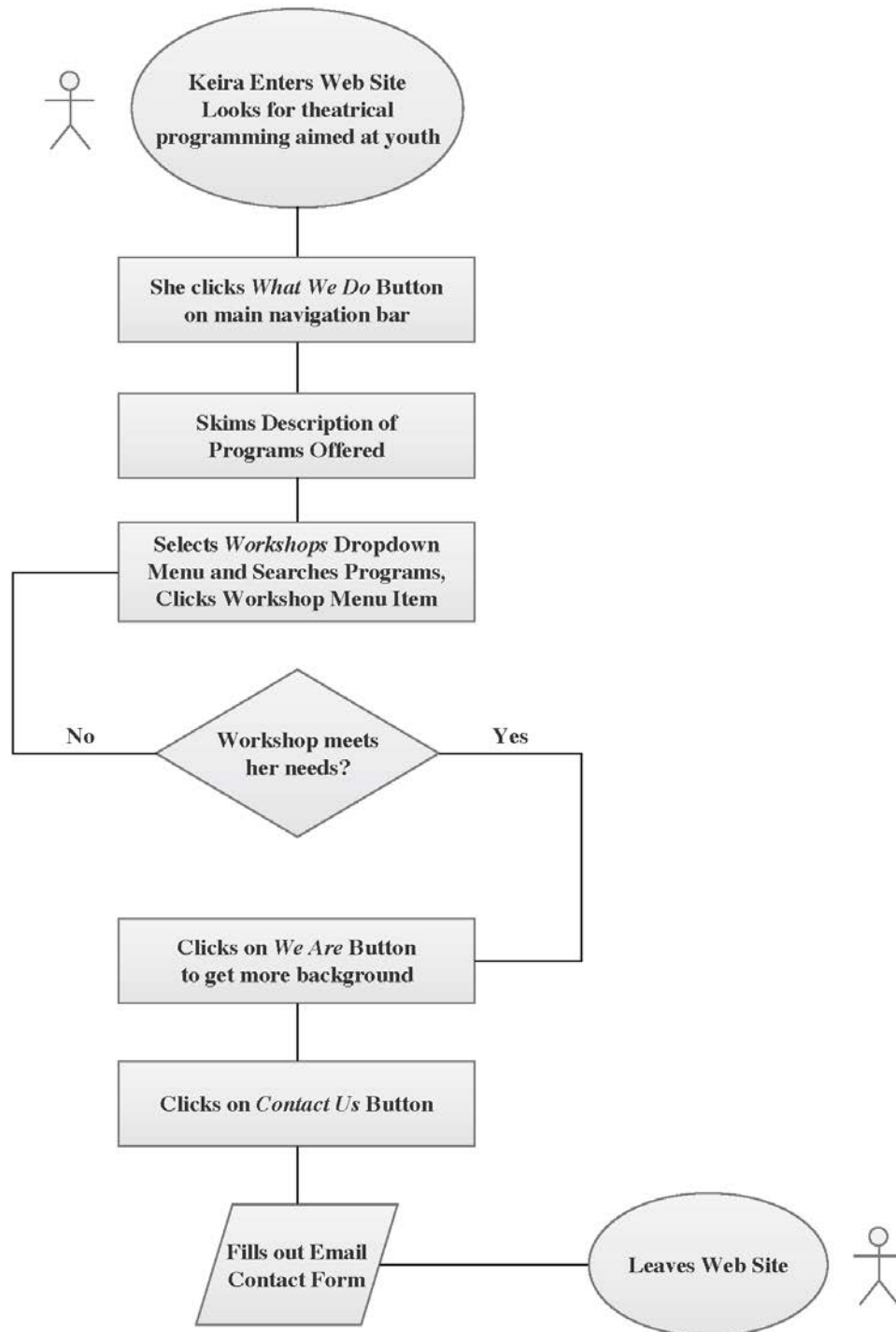
ART Archives: View showing a photo from Mighty Story Action Time in automated slideshow.

## High Fidelity Interactive Wireframes

Given the longstanding existing web site, high fidelity interactive wireframes seemed a desirable step, rather than low fidelity gray scale. These wireframes went through a total of six iterations. The final iteration is available live on the Internet at <http://boz7gf.axshare.com/> - c=2.

## User Flow for Keira, Librarian/Curator, 27 years old

### User Flow: Keira, the Librarian/Curator, 27 years old



## User Testing

User testing began at the third of six iterations of high fidelity interactive wireframes. This process took on a distinctly agile development feel in that before a complete prototype could be generated, necessity and desirability for revision intervened, starting the process over once again.

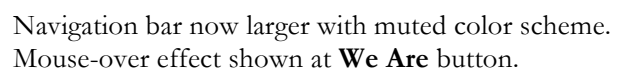
The very first iteration that mocked up only the home page, offering only the interactivity of mouse-over effects, was a sort of teaser distributed only to the site owners to give them a sense of what was to come:



This early prototype shows a very useful early frame of reference for the five iterations that followed.

A before and after shot clearly show issues addressed within the third and fourth iteration. Among the issues raised with Iteration #3 by the first two testers were:

- In the before and after shots that appear below, the first two points were addressed. Though not shown here, a solution for the third signifier issue was also devised for Iteration #4.



The next round of testing included three more students who tested the fourth iteration prototype. Substantive observations included:

- The third and fourth iterations introduced horizontal secondary navigation. This navigation was not distinguishable as such and needed to stretch further across the screen.
- Social networking icons, employed for the first time in the third iteration, could be better placed as a consistent element that would help frame the content area of the pages.
- The **Subscribe to ART** button seemed disruptive in its location just below the **What's New** button because it was followed with several buttons leading to information more important to visitors. Suggestion: the button should be moved above or below the **Contact Us** button.
- Small logo present in page groups linked to the home page is distracting in its current position. Suggestion: Move the logo above the vertical navigation bar, and then move the horizontal navigation down to the same vertical position of the vertical navigation bar.
- Have some content on the front page, not just the site logo and navigation.

## Before



## After



Iteration #5 shows implementation of several suggestions given about the “Before” screen to the left.



Testing continued for the fifth iteration with the final three students, producing the following substantive observations:

- Again, more content on front page, perhaps even a video.
- Horizontal sub-navigation still not obvious enough. Perhaps capitalize menu items. Also, normally dropdown menus feature a downward pointing arrow (though not provided in the default Axure menu widget).
- On Media page, dropdown menu for videos is likely to become impractically long as videos get added. Suggestion: Make list of scrollable thumbnails (similar to YouTube) that expand and play when clicked.
- On Home Page, **Mission Statement** appears as an afterthought at the right of the screen because the eye does not naturally scan there given the dominant position of the site logo.

For the home page issue, this was resolved as follows:

## Before



## After



In its new position, the mission statement takes on more prominence.

The remaining substantive issues outlined above were resolved as follows:

## Before



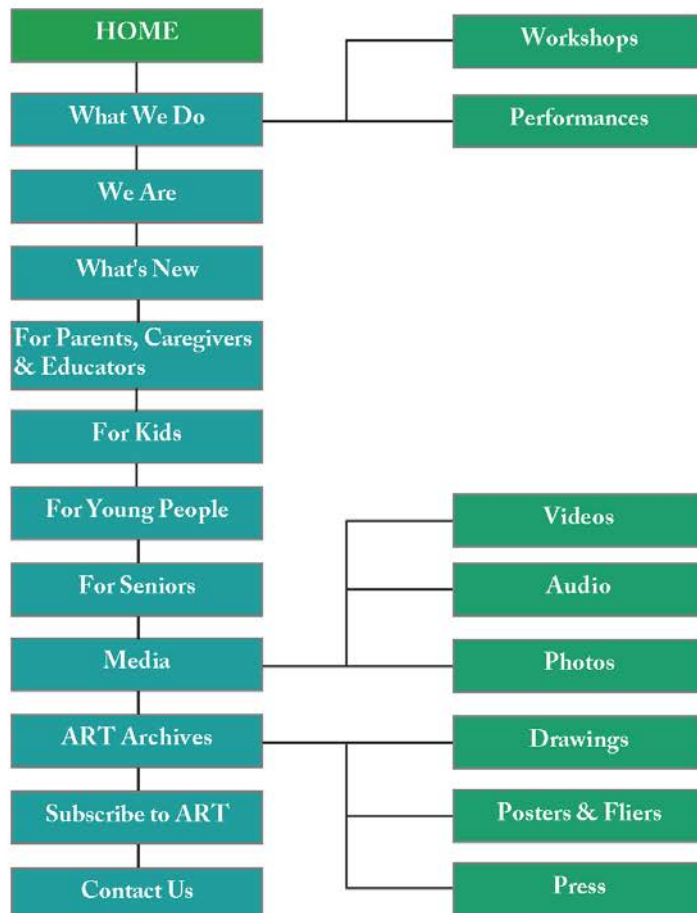
## After



This sixth iteration shows several improvements requested above including a more noticeable and prominent horizontal navigation, and provision of the typical down arrow signifier for the dropdown menu at its extreme right.

## Site Map

### Action Racket Theatre Site Map



**NOTE:** this sitemap shows first and second level page groups only so as to fit on one page. Sub-sub groups are discernable in the high fidelity clickable prototype.

## High Fidelity Annotated Wireframe

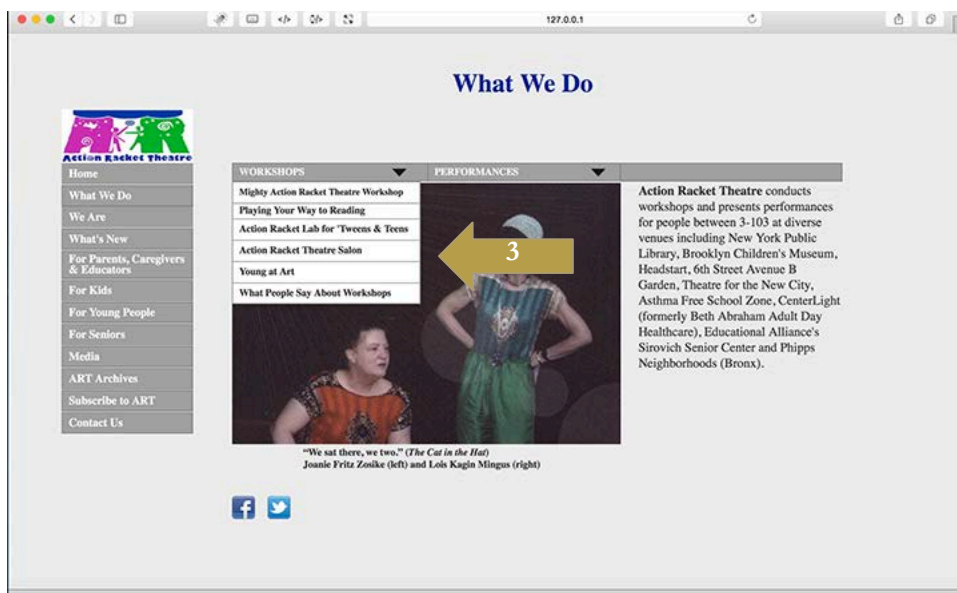
**NOTE:** The following annotations exclude linked pages for buttons **What's New**, **For Parents, Caregivers & Educators**, **For Kids**, **For Young People** and **For Seniors**. They are absent because the content for these sections are currently under development. There are, however, dummy pages for each of these in the high fidelity clickable wireframe.



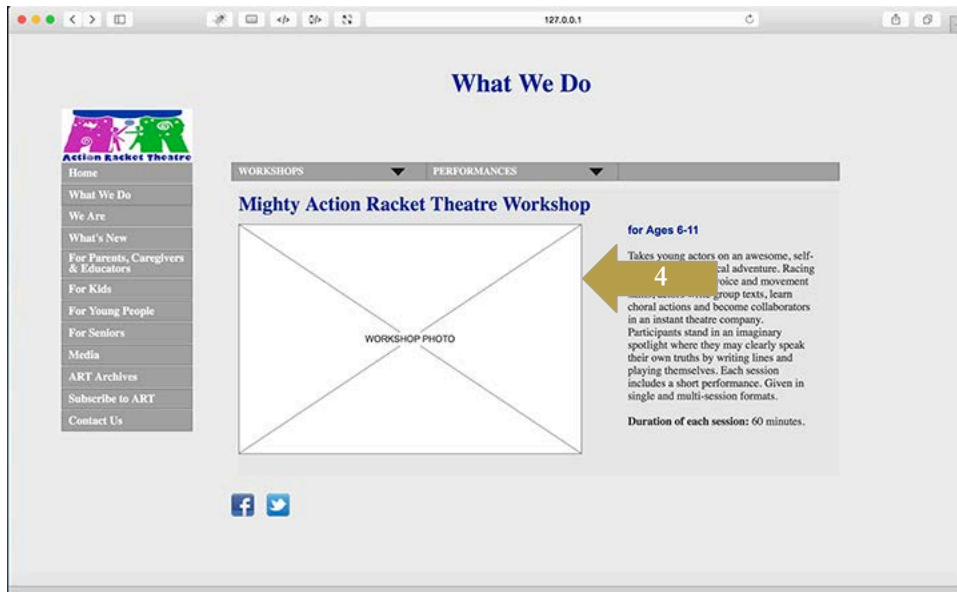
1) **Main navigation bar:** This navigation is persistent through the entire site.



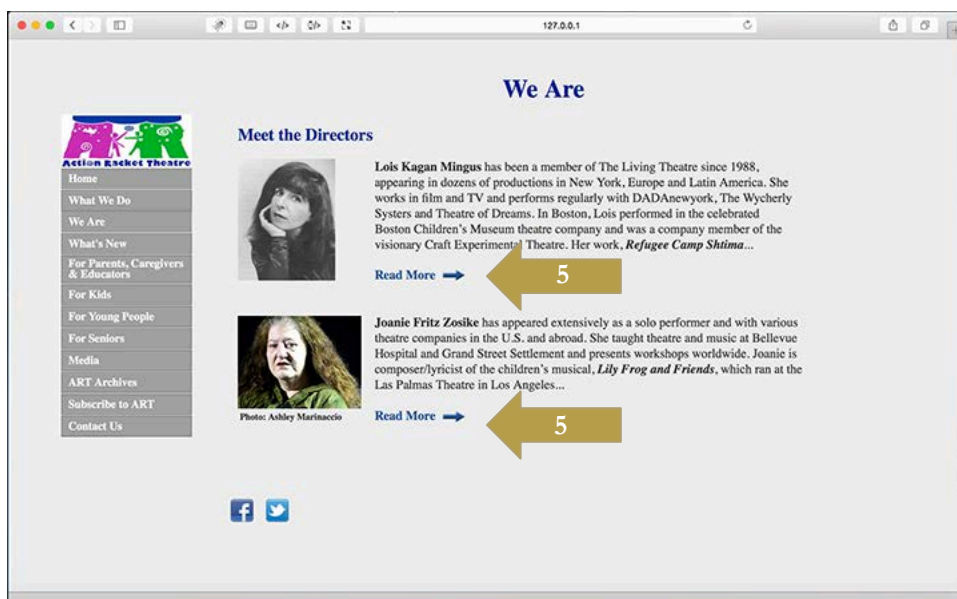
2) **What We Do** landing page with two dropdown menus. Click on either downward pointing arrow to reveal the menu.



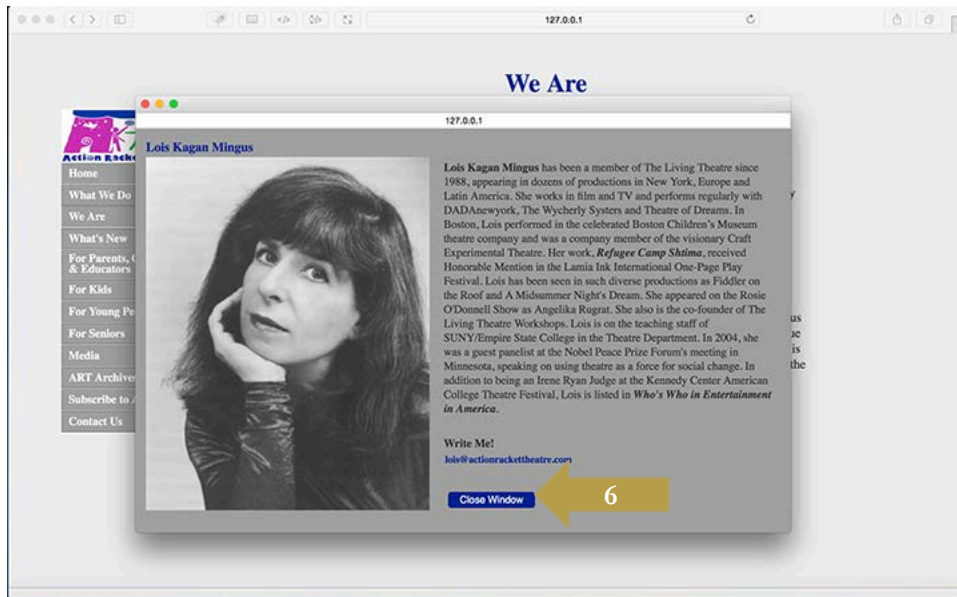
3) **WORKSHOPS** dropdown menu. Click on any menu item to bring up its page.



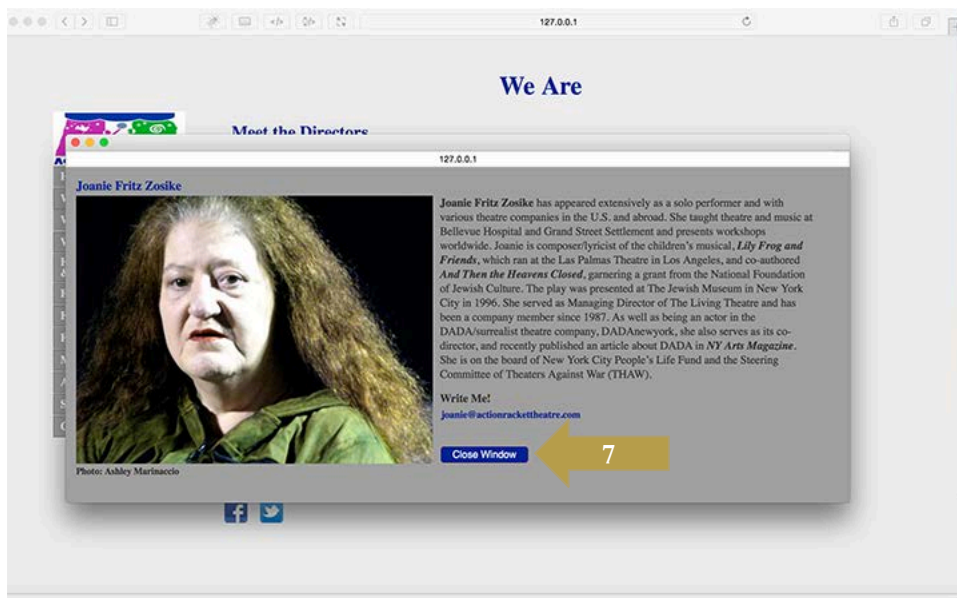
4) **Mighty Action Racket Theatre Workshop** selected. Placeholder for workshop photo indicated.



5) Clicking on either "Read More" or arrow opens a window with the full bio and email address.

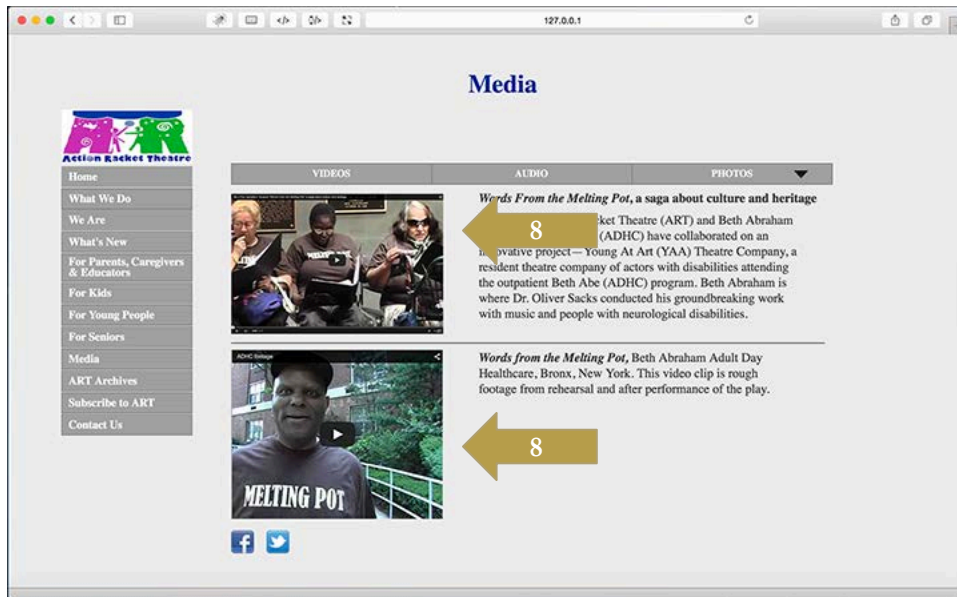


6) Click here to close window and return to **We Are** landing page.



7) Click here to close window and return to **We Are** landing page.





8) Click on either video thumbnail and video opens window of full size video.



9) PHOTOS dropdown menu. Click to select slide show.





10) Click here to close video player window.

11) Click here to play video.

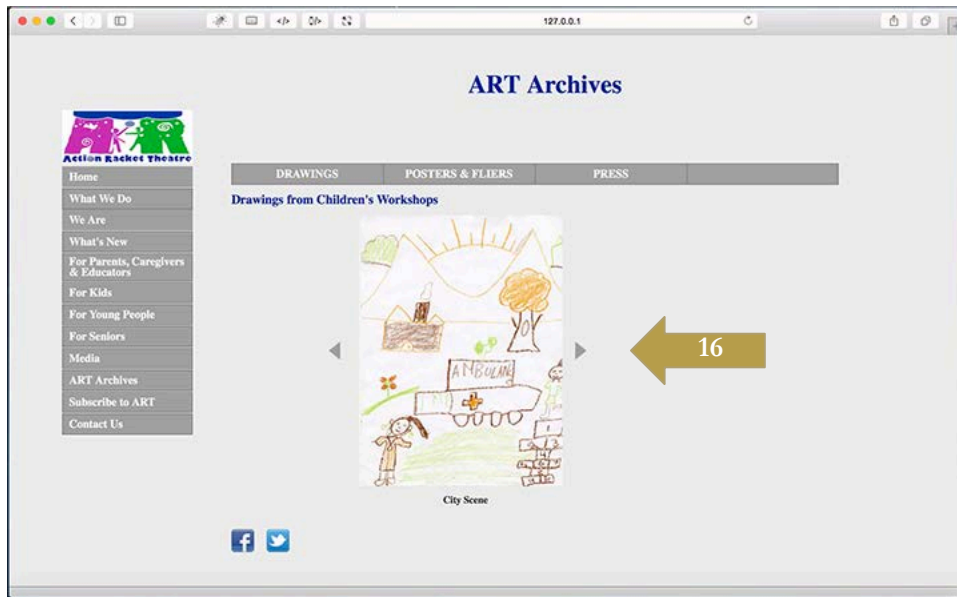
12) Click here to play video.



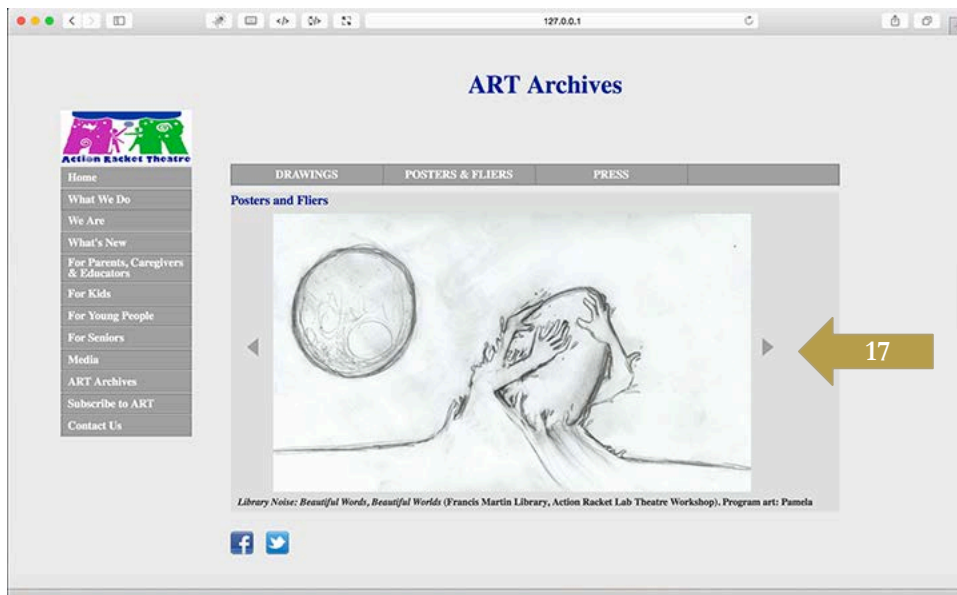
13) Click here to close video player window.

14) Click here to play video.

15) Click here to play video.



17) Mockup for automated slide show. Arrows click backward and forward through slides.



17) Mockup for automated slide show. Arrows click backward and forward through slides.

**Subscribe to ART**

**Join Our Subscription List**  
Please join our subscription list. We will keep you informed of upcoming events and new programs periodically throughout the year.

**Select All that Apply**

- ☐ I would like to hear about children's workshops
- ☐ I would like to hear about teen and young adult workshops
- ☐ I am interested in programs for seniors.
- ☐ All of the Above

First Name  Last Name

Email Address

[Subscribe](#)

18) Select options for notifications.

19) Fill in First Name, Last Name and Email Address.

20) Click on subscribe.

**Subscribe to ART**

**Thank You for Your Interest in Action Racket Theatre**  
You will be receiving a confirmation email from us within the next few minutes. Please respond to this email to confirm your subscription.

If you do not see our email, check your settings to make sure that our message did not land in your Junk Mail.

We look forward to being in touch with you.

[Continue Browsing Our Site](#)

21) Click to continue browsing from home page.

**Contact Us**

Please fill in your name and email address below. You may send us your questions and comments, and we will get back to you as soon as possible (usually within 48 hours).

First Name  Last Name

Your Email

Or Call for Info: 646-234-1234

22

23

24

22) Fill in First Name, Last Name and Your Email.

23) Click submit after typing message below.

24) Type message, then click submit button above.

**Contact Us**

**Thank You. Your email has been received.**

We will get back to you as soon as possible.

25

25) Click to continue browsing from home page.

## Conclusion

This project is a launch pad, so to speak. Material contained within the high definition clickable prototype is representative of content. However, plans in future months include massive edits of content, and addition of fresh content organized within the new simple schema. We imagine a 6-9 month schedule that will include further prototyping, creation of comps and further user testing. We hope to launch the new site before the end of next year.

The opportunity provided by this project has been invaluable both personally to me and to Action Racket Theatre, and we are very optimistic about the future prospects for both the web site and the company.