

NAEA Members Travel to Havana, Cuba

Thirty-five members took part in NAEA's fifth academic research travel experience as part of the NAEA International Research in Art Education Program.

See President Pat Franklin's column on page 2 for more information.



Clockwise from top: Typical taxis in Cuba.

Whimsical mosaic art at the home of artist Jose Fuster.

President Pat Franklin with students and their artwork at the Casa Del Niño y La Niña.

Students exercising in the square in Old Havana.



Cultural Connections: Promoting Global Understanding

Patricia (Pat) Franklin

Members of NAEA have had extraordinary opportunities over the past 5 years to participate in research delegations exploring the status of art education in other countries. Many of these participants have commented that their travel experiences have been life-changing as well as assets to their professional growth. Members of our Association have become world travelers, carrying and sharing the benefits and value of art education around the globe.

Each time art educators travel abroad, or to other regions within the United States, they are leading by sharing examples and connecting with other art educators. When these travelers return, they bring back information to share with their colleagues and students. And they are creating bridges to support global understanding through the arts. It is wonderful to see the opportunities our educators create to reach out to teachers in other cultures, and they are thrilled to do it! They know that every new experience directly or indirectly benefits their students and our profession.

Your NAEA leaders recently had two international opportunities which directly support our mission to **advance visual arts education to fulfill human potential and promote global understanding**.¹ In late July, NAEA leaders accepted an invitation to participate in a sharing opportunity in China. Our leader delegation included Past President Robert Sabol, Chief Learning Officer Dennis Inhulsen, and myself. The NAEA delegation was invited by Yang Mythos Art Education International Group President Moses Wang and YMM founder Mythos Yang to participate in the YMM 10th-Anniversary Grand Exhibition and the 2015 China-U.S. Art Education Summit in Shenzhen, China. The summit's goal was to establish a platform for international art educators to exchange information. Representatives included presenters from China, the US, France, Canada, and India. Dialogues focused on logistics, curriculum, and assessment in art education. The forum provided an opportunity for NAEA to participate in important global conversations about art education.

It was an honor for NAEA leaders to participate in this special 10-year anniversary event. Through YMM's generosity, our leaders were able to travel and experience first-hand the people and culture of China. Our NAEA leader delegation was given a rare opportunity to observe locations and artifacts representing China's rich history. Additionally, we experienced the host city of Shenzhen. The youngest city in China, Shenzhen represents its bright future. We look forward to continuing conversations and connecting in other ways with art educators in China.

In October, a delegation of 35 NAEA members traveled to Havana, Cuba, as part of the NAEA International Research in Art Education Program. Because we are committed to achieving both NAEA's Strategic Vision goals and our mission of promoting global understanding, NAEA sponsored our fifth academic research travel experience. When NAEA established academic travel for members 5 years ago, Cuba was the first destination. With the recent moves toward normalization of relations between our two countries, Cuban educators look forward to increased contact with U.S. educators and are seeking support for their art programs. Participants included representation of all NAEA regions, and all membership divisions.

Members of the group included: NAEA Past President **Robert Sabol** and myself as co-delegation leaders, with **Liz Allen, Tammarra Ballard, Maria Barbosa, Kim Bonney, Sarah Brown, Kristin Calohan, Eileen Cave, Greg Charles, Diane Christie, Calvin Coleman, Barbara Crandell, Rhonda Dallas, Anita de la Cruz, Rachael Dornbush, Jeff Eason, Barbara Ervin, Nichol Fall, Evelyn Hay, Kathleen Keys, Alison Lee, Diane Lindley, Jane Mallonee, Gina Mellinger Alicea, Samantha Melvin, Priscilla Ocasio, Jeanna Pena, Laura Rahaim, Janet Reynolds, Sarah Robertson Palmer, Jennifer Torres, Julie VanDewark, Diana Woodruff, and Karen Yandow.**

On our first day, representatives of the Cuban government met with the delegation to discuss educational policy, curriculum, assessment, funding, instructional resources, and practices. During the week, our delegation toured a variety of arts education facilities including the National School of the Arts and the San Alejandro Academy.

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These visits gave us a glimpse into the importance of the arts and the role they played in preserving Cuban culture. We were able to interact with students, faculty, and administrators of elementary and secondary arts education facilities as well as institutions of higher education preparing students for careers in the arts.

One highlight of the Cuban experience included interacting with students of an after-school visual arts program which served special-needs learners. This was of particular interest to several members of the delegation and they were overjoyed to see the inclusion of special needs in this program. Our cultural experience also included a home visit to community project artist Jose Fuster. We appreciated how his playful creations provided an uplifting influence for his older neighborhood. Before our visit ended we had been carried away by the uniquely Cuban visual art, music, and dance. Many of our delegation were convinced that they had been *Cubanized*, to coin a phrase used by our tour guide at the Museo Nacional De Bellas Artes in reference to Cuban artists' interpretation of Cubism. He explained that Cuban artists always put their own cultural spin on styles of art and we could easily see the truth in this statement.



NAEA delegation to Cuba responding to a student performance at a performing arts school dedicated to school of Paulita Concepcion.

Our experiences in Havana were memorable! Those in our delegation who traveled with the first group to Cuba shared that little appeared to have changed since the 2005 Cuban experience. In conversations with Cuban educators, however, change is anticipated over the next 5 years based on relaxation of US-Cuba restrictions.

During the NAEA National Convention, members of the delegation will share the benefits of this professional development opportunity, the outcomes of their research, and the influence this experience has had—and will have—on their art classrooms and programs. Please join us and take the opportunity to learn more about this cultural exchange and future opportunities planned by NAEA.

Our 2016 National Convention in Chicago is only a short time away! See you soon! ■

Endnote

¹ www.arteducators.org/about-us

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