

culture connect

The Meridian Center for Cultural Diplomacy

January – June 2015



Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Culture Connect*, the semi-annual newsletter of the Meridian Center for Cultural Diplomacy (MCCD), which for over 35 years has designed exhibitions and cultural exchanges with international and domestic partners. This first issue introduces our latest projects involving contemporary art, historical photographs, live performances, educational programs, panel discussions, and public murals.

Our work brings together Americans and people from around the world and contributes to greater understanding by connecting and educating global leaders. *Culture Connect* will share updates from MCCD on its exhibitions, events, and exchanges for artists, musicians, cultural organizers, and others.

Dr. Curtis Sandberg

Senior Vice President of Arts and Cultural Programs
Meridian International Center

Learn More

www.meridian.org/culture



Past Forward: Contemporary Art from the Emirates

Curated by MCCD with the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, DC

Past Forward, which shares the art, history, and culture of the United Arab Emirates with American audiences, was featured at the LA Art Show in January before launching at The Fowler Museum at UCLA. UAE Consul General Abdulla Alsaboosi inaugurated the show in Los Angeles, and artists Shaikha Al Mazrou and Khalid Shafar traveled from the Emirates for an exchange that included educational outreach to LA schools. Al Mazrou and Shafar also joined Dr. Sandberg and co-curator Noor Al Suwaidi for a panel discussion about art, culture, and identity.

From May through June, *Past Forward* was displayed at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture in Spokane, Washington, where it received rave reviews. On his first visit to the area, celebrated Emirati artist Abdul Qader Al Rais met with local artists and students and connected with the American Indian community. Activities included a week of community events. *Past Forward* will next go to the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum in East Lansing, Michigan, in August.



Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration

Meridian welcomed the Year of the Goat at the 5th Annual Lunar New Year Celebration with the Embassy of China on February 12. After hearing welcoming remarks by Meridian's President and CEO Ambassador Stuart Holliday, Minister Wu Xi of the Chinese Embassy, and Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY), guests enjoyed Chinese cuisine and music, as well as the heritage and art of Shaanxi Province.

Community Engagement through the Mural Arts

In 2013, Meridian was awarded a grant by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to send American mural artists on exchanges to engage communities abroad. Between November 2014 and June 2015, Meridian sent four muralists to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Colombia. So far, the program has produced **18 murals and paintings in 10 cities and 4 countries** that are viewed by thousands. Meridian, ECA, and U.S. Embassies are currently selecting four more muralists for exchanges in Brazil, Cuba, India, and Turkey starting later this year.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Christine Kuhn from Lexington, Kentucky, traveled to Kinshasa, Matadi, and Bukavu, where she worked with Culture +, the Bukavu Youth Action Center, and student artists to create four murals and one large painting. The themes reflected in these murals encompass women's empowerment and the future of the Congo.



Nicaragua

In January, MCCD sent Paul Santoleri, a Philadelphia artist, to Nicaragua to collaborate with at-risk youth in Bluefields, Chinandega, El Viejo, León, and Managua. Paul designed and painted seven murals during his month-long exchange with the help of Jóvenes por el Diálogo and local participants.



Honduras

In March and April, Philadelphia-based artist Michelle Angela Ortiz went to the 21 de Febrero and Estados Unidos neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. With help from Alianza Joven-USAID, Michelle, four local artists, and youth designed and painted two murals about the environment, women, youth, and security.



Colombia

Augustina Droze of Buffalo, New York, created four stunning murals in Cali, Colombia, in just three weeks. Along with the main mural, Augustina worked with Centro Cultural Colombo Americano to organize workshops with artists and youth about social inclusion and women's empowerment.

Kindred Nations: The United States and India, 1783-1947

Curated by MCCD for the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi

On March 12, *Kindred Nations* was inaugurated at the India Habitat Centre (IHC) in New Delhi by U.S. Ambassador Richard Verma and by IHC Director Dr. Alka Pande. The exhibition, which conveys the range of U.S.-India interactions, was subsequently on view at the U.S. Embassy's American Center, where it was seen by thousands. *Kindred Nations* will be displayed at public venues in Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Kolkata in partnership with U.S. Consulates.



Path to Harmony: The United States and China, 1784-1979

Curated by MCCD for the U.S. Embassy in Beijing

Path to Harmony: The United States and China, 1784-1979 is an exhibition that chronicles the history of American and Chinese interactions, and includes a catalogue with a forward written by Secretary of State John Kerry. Guests at Meridian's Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration had a sneak peak of selected images in February. The U.S. Embassy in Beijing is organizing the tour around China and plans to launch *Path to Harmony* at a public venue in the Chinese capital this summer.

Upcoming

Stay tuned to find out where MCCD exhibitions *Past Forward*, *Kindred Nations*, and *Path to Harmony* will be traveling next, as well as for an announcement on the next set of artists for the Community Engagement through the Mural Arts exchange program. MCCD has a busy summer ahead as we submit proposals, conduct research for new exhibitions, and prepare for Bahrain Culture Week, taking place in late October.

National Arts Council

Meridian's National Arts Council members serve as our ambassadors outside of Washington, D.C., to help MCCD identify opportunities for exchanges, partnerships, and programs. We are seeking new candidates to join NAC and expand our reach nationwide.

To learn more or to join the NAC, please contact Dr. Curtis Sandberg at csandberg@meridian.org.





Meet the Staff

With their collective expertise, MCCD staff create innovative programs tailored for public, private, and government partners



Dr. Curtis Sandberg

Senior Vice President of Arts and Cultural Programs

With degrees in archaeology and anthropology from Harvard University, Curtis has had extensive museum experience in the United States, Europe, and Asia. He lectures at conferences, as well as at museums, diplomatic missions, and cultural organizations in the United States and abroad. Curtis directs MCCD and its exhibitions, exchanges, and educational programming.



Terry K. Harvey

Vice President of Cultural Programs

Terry has a B.A. in Art from Radford University. Since joining Meridian in 2002, he has been involved in dozens of exhibitions and cultural programs and plays a vital role in finding domestic and international partners for MCCD exchanges. His activities include exhibition design, managing cultural tours in the United States and abroad, and overseeing MCCD's finances.



Lindsay Amini

Director of Cultural Programs

Lindsay received her B.A. in Art History from Emory University and her M.A. in Art History from The George Washington University. She joined Meridian in 2011 and manages the development of proposals, exchanges, and exhibitions. Lindsay also oversees MCCD's museum education and community outreach activities, presenting diverse cultures to K-12 students worldwide.



Athena Hsieh

Cultural Programs Coordinator

Athena joined Meridian in February 2014. She has a B.A. in Archaeology from Tufts University and a M.A. in Museum Studies from The George Washington University. With over five years in museums and cultural organizations, Athena closely supports the management and development of Meridian's exhibitions and cultural exchanges for U.S. and foreign governments.



Meridian has employed culture – including art, cuisine, performance, cinema, and music – to create greater understanding between countries and individuals since 1978, and formally established MCCD in 2014 to better address this mission.

We welcome partners and funders for:

Cultural and Bilateral Exhibitions

Showcase international art, cultural heritage, and bilateral relationships in a meaningful and accessible fashion.

People-to-People Exchanges

Connect international visual and performing artists and arts administrators to engage with their American counterparts.

Cultural Diplomacy Summits

Bring together leaders across all sectors to address global challenges through collaboration and cooperation.

International Museum Capacity Building

Create training programs to enhance professional knowledge and advance universal museum standards and best practices.