

The Midwest Artist Studios Project



A Guest Posting by Frank Juarez

In early 2014 I found myself thinking about my current teaching practice, the idea of literacy within the art room, and wondering if what I am doing inside the art room is preparing my students to become successful after graduation. In my district we need to implement strategies to address literacy within our curriculum and instruction. How does this look like inside my art room, I ask myself?

I often hear art educators say that they want to have students “just” make art. The reality is that there is so much more we need to do such as creating opportunities for students to present, respond, and connect to art. In what ways do I do this so that learning continues to be exciting, relevant, and enriching while addressing literacy? How can I get my students to invest in reading, writing, and discussing about different types of art, artists, influences, and processes.



Josie Osborne behind the scene

I began thinking about my personal and educational projects such as the North High Artist in Residence Program, Artist Lecture Series, Frank Juarez Gallery, my own studio practice, and the 365 Artists 365 Days project. Through these experiences how I can create something totally unique for my students? What can I do to infuse different aspects of the aforementioned projects/programs to create an even richer art experience for my students and still be able to do what I need to do as an art teacher?

The answer was to create something that will expose students to local and regional artists, educate them on various processes, techniques, and media as well as engage them in art-making process and to create an opportunity for my students to interact with artists.

When you think of successful artists or where artists live what do you think of? Do you think about New York, Los Angeles or Miami? How often do we think about artists in our own art community or living in our state or region? This inquiry drove me to focus on artists living in the Midwest resulting in a series of studio visits aimed to document them inside their studio, to interview them on their practice, to learn how their art education experience inspired them to pursue their artistic career, and to hear their advice for our next generation of artists.



Suzanne Torres behind the scene

The project that I designed is called The Midwest Artist Studios™ (MAS) Project. This project connects two areas - contemporary art and art education. The thought of traveling the Midwest and the idea of visiting studios was overwhelming. I knew I would not be able to do it alone so I was able to put together a team of art enthusiasts, Erika L Block (writer), Pat Ryan (photographer) and Jonathan Fritsch (assistant), and myself.

The MAS project is a 3-part project resulting in visiting 4 states each summer starting with the summer of 2014 and finishing in the summer of 2016. This past summer took us to Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin visiting a total of 9 artists.



Todd Mrozinski behind the scene

After our first set of studio visits we began to edit our interviews, photographs, audio, and videos. This would result in the publication of the Midwest Artist Studios™ catalog, curriculum workbook and our website, midwestartiststudios.com. The catalog features all 9 artists, which will introduce my students to their studio practices along with full interviews. The workbook features lesson plans designed to introduce students to varied processes, techniques, traditional and non-traditional media based on our artists' work. It also provides me with opportunities to Skype these artists inside my art room, ways to differentiate instruction, implement technology, incorporate literacy, and to have access to videos and a gallery of images via the MAS website. This unique opportunity allows interactive lesson planning!

What I find personally rewarding is the fact that these artists have agreed to be accessible to talk to my students. This is such a great way for my students to talk "art speak" with these artists whose art will influence them to create with their own artistic voice. What started as a personal journey developed into a project that I believe can benefit art teachers across the Midwest and beyond. The Midwest Artist Studios™ Project connects contemporary art with art education through studio visits, curriculum development, and opportunities for educator outreach.

This year I will be repeating this process of recruiting artists for this summer. This project will take us to Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. If you are a practicing artist, I would love to hear from you. Perhaps I can design a lesson plan based on your work.

For more information on The Midwest Artist Studios™ Project contact Frank Juarez, founder and art educator, at midwestartiststudios@gmail.com [<mailto:midwestartiststudios@gmail.com>] or visit midwestartiststudios.com.