

## **TransCultural Exchange – History and Mission**

### **Mary Sherman, Director**

Incorporated Sept. 17, 2002 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, TransCultural Exchange's mission is to foster a greater understanding of world cultures through high-quality art exhibitions, cultural exchanges and a biennale conference.

Since its grassroots inception in 1989, TransCultural Exchange has worked directly with hundreds of artists, arts organizations, foundations, galleries, museums and cultural centers in 60+ countries to produce over 350+ exhibitions. The organization also provides professional development resources, new markets and career opportunities for hundreds of artists; creates additional revenue streams, including for TransCultural Exchange's home state of Massachusetts<sup>1</sup>; and facilitates new partnerships and exchanges between international organizations and educational institutions, leading to increased visibility, cultural understanding and economic activity. TransCultural Exchange's website also is a major source of information for artists and those who support them. Featuring links to dedicated portals documenting the organization's exhibitions, exchanges and biennale conferences and to other organizations, funders, exhibition calls and employment opportunities, by April 2011, the website's monthly hits averaged over 1.5 million. In 2010, TransCultural Exchange expanded its range of resources to include an international advisory board. See <http://www.transculturalexchange.org/board.htm>

Over two decades of service has earned TransCultural Exchange awards from institutions such as the International Art Critics Association and support from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the Massachusetts Cultural Council, Asian Cultural Council, Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, Boston Foundation, Swedish Embassy, numerous consulates and the Netherland-American Foundation, among others. See [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/sponsors\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/sponsors_fr.htm)

### **Specific Activities:**

TransCultural Exchange's first exhibition and artist exchange was *Reverse Angle* (Chicago's Ludwig Drum Factory and Vienna's WUK Kunsthalle 1989-1990)

[http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_reverse\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_reverse_fr.htm)

followed by exhibits at such venues as NYC's Trans Hudson Gallery (1998 and 2000),

- [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_bound\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_bound_fr.htm) 1998

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<sup>1</sup> TransCultural Exchange's 2007 and 2009 conferences combined created a total state economic impact of \$1,163,075 and 11 full-time jobs. Preliminary 2011 conference figures suggest an additional state economic impact of \$1,112,794 and 12 full-time jobs. [New England Foundation for the Arts' CultureCount Calculator].

These figures are detailed in the 2007, 2009 Conference Evaluation and Surveys

[http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference\\_2011/surveys.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference_2011/surveys.htm)

and soon to be released 2011 Conference Evaluation and Surveys.

- [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_nomads2\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_nomads2_fr.htm) 2000 Seoul's Kwanhoon Gallery (1999)
- [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_nomads\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_nomads_fr.htm) and the London Biennale (2000, 2008 and 2010).
- [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_london\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_london_fr.htm) 2000
- [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_london\\_08\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_london_08_fr.htm)
- [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_london\\_10\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_london_10_fr.htm)

More recently, from 2002 to 2004, over 100 artists participated in *The Coaster Project's* [http://www.transculturalexchange.org/coasterproject/index\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/coasterproject/index_fr.htm) 200 exhibitions stretching across all seven continents, resulting in over 10,000 art works freely given away and a 1<sup>st</sup> place award from International Art Critics Association. For its UNESCO-sponsored *The Tile Project* (2002-04), ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/tileproject/index\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/tileproject/index_fr.htm)) hundreds of artists donated tiles to 22 world sites to create 22 site-specific, permanent public artworks throughout the world. Harvard's Kennedy Fellow Nolan Bowie described it, "As a testament that global cooperation is possible in this increasingly fractured world, this project is indeed it." For *Here, There and Everywhere* (2008-11), ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_hereandthere\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_hereandthere_fr.htm)) for 2008 and here for 2011 ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_hte2011\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_hte2011_fr.htm)) again, hundreds of artists collaborated with individuals from 60+ countries, resulting in 100+ exhibits in galleries, major museums (e.g. the MIT Museum, Shanghai's Zendai MoMA and Switzerland's Luzerne Kunsthalle) and public spaces.

Additionally, TransCultural Exchange has produced three Boston biennale Conferences (2007, 2009 and 2011, referred to "as one of the best things in the art world today," by London Biennale Director David Medella.

As evaluations ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference\\_2011/surveys.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference_2011/surveys.htm)) over the past 6 years prove, the conferences have consistently met TransCultural Exchange's goal to produce tangible benefits to Americans working in the field of visual arts.

In 2007 TransCultural Exchange thought to bring the world to Boston for its first biennale *Conference on International Opportunities in the Arts*. ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference\\_2007/overview.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference_2007/overview.htm)) The idea was to help American artists learn about opportunities to interact with their international peers, find ways to launch their careers abroad and expand their horizons beyond their studio walls. What we didn't expect was that such a very large number of those attendees would go on to do just that. Emboldened, we tried the experiment again. And then, further emboldened by the second experience and a newly formed international advisory board, (<http://www.transculturalexchange.org/board.htm#advisors>) we are doing so again now – and on a scale that still leaves me astonished by how large this dream has grown.

TransCultural Exchange's Conferences are the only of their kind in the World. Devoted to practicing artists and those who support them, they provide a forum for networking, professional development, exhibiting and promoting artwork, discussing research and learning about issues related to the practical needs of artists, arts organizations and educational institutions, including concrete information about how those in the arts can take advantage of international opportunities and residencies, which are often the first step towards increased earnings, raised professional profiles and access to new markets. The Conferences include panels (on topics such as the collision of art and new technologies, the need for cultural diplomacy, integrating art and social good and survival skills for artists, and presentations by leading artists) workshops (on grant writing, successful residency applications and digitizing portfolios), portfolio reviews and mentoring sessions (with curators, gallery owners and critics), museum and gallery tour, exhibits, etc. They directly serve ~500 artists, curators, art administrators, art suppliers, art departments and artist residency representatives, etc – thereby indirectly serving hundreds more. To be affordable for artists, registration fees are among the lowest of any comparable conference, scholarships are available and a student discount is provided.

Surveys, administered during past conferences and online, indicate that over 40% of the conference attendees received direct, tangible outcomes as a result: 5 artists secured teaching positions, 3 Fulbrights, 4 curatorial jobs, 3 arts administration positions, 150+ invites to exhibit and 90+ invites to residency programs, which typically include free studio space, room, board, an exhibit and access to new markets/networks, etc. These impacts are generative and sustaining: participation in one program often leads to others. For instance, Mass. artist Ellen Schon was invited to Finland's Hovinkartano Art Center's residency, which led to another in Croatia, exhibitions in both countries and a show traveling to the US, Finland and Israel. Arts organizations (30+% of the conference attendees) also benefited. Local galleries noted increased sales. Sponsors such as MassArt saw an increase in applications; they and other local institutions benefited from lectures and critiques from the conference speakers; students made valuable contacts as conference volunteers (all the a/v interns received at least 1 residency invite); and other arts organizations repeatedly noted gaining "new artists for their programs," "awareness of new resources" and "increased visibility."

TransCultural Exchange's global projects also stimulate and increase engagement in cultural activities. As University of Mass. Amherst's Hampden and Central Galleries' director Anne LaPrade (who hosted 11 of TransCultural Exchange's 2009 exhibits) noted, "website traffic increased by 25%, gallery attendance was up 15% or about 1000 visitors" and, through a TransCultural Exchange facilitated exchange, "an international residency director gave talks and conducted studio visits, resulting in a residency for 2 local artists." TransCultural Exchange's conferences combined have produced a total state economic impact of over \$ 2 million and the creation of over 20 jobs. 80+% of the A artists who have participated in TransCultural Exchange's programs indicated that they gained greater political awareness, cultural sensitivity, access to new networks, increased attention and visibility for their work, and learned new skills (e.g. language and website applications), which have long-term benefits for those in the visual arts and, ultimately, the economic, cultural and social health of our communities.

Within one year of its first conference, TransCultural Exchange's website hits tripled and requests for services grew ten-fold. From 2009 to 2010, TransCultural Exchange's website hits per month went from 424,440 to 763,486 and, to date, average 1,963,190. This confirms TCE's survey findings that its programs are serving the needs of hundreds in the visual arts and that the website is a valuable resource.

TransCultural Exchange's activities are, as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation suggests for best-practices, "SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound." TransCultural Exchange's survey methodology was devised with UMass Dartmouth's Center for Policy Analysis to evaluate TransCultural Exchange's initiatives, economic impact and assess how international programs affect artists' careers. Surveys were given to visual artists in attendance at the past 3 conferences with email follow-ups. In addition to rating TransCultural Exchange's programs - qualitatively and quantitatively - and providing demographic information, questionnaires asked for the number and kind of programs the artists attended or participated in as a result of TransCultural Exchange's initiatives and the impacts on their work and careers. Data was cross-tabulated to access the programs' success from different viewpoints. This information helped refine past programs and TransCultural Exchange is committed to continuing to annually conduct and biennially publish evaluations of its programs' impacts to refine its activities and provide TransCultural Exchange and others with statistical evidence to advocate the benefits (e.g. economic, cultural, social, etc) of the arts in our communities.

For this past April 2011 Conference, ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference\\_2011/index.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/conference_2011/index.htm)) the number of speakers nearly tripled, the days doubled and the locations quadrupled. Concerts, readings, exhibits, a screening program and hundreds of portfolio reviews were added. At the same time, TransCultural Exchange produced another global project *Here, There and Everywhere: The Art of Collaboration* ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_hte2011\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_hte2011_fr.htm)) and, for the third time, last year participated in the *London Biennale*. ([http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo\\_london\\_10\\_fr.htm](http://www.transculturalexchange.org/expo_london_10_fr.htm))

True to its two decades of trans-discipline, cross-cultural activities, TransCultural Exchange's *London Biennale* participation was a Curated Salon. The 'rules' were simple: No artwork was required. Artists only needed to come and bring a non-artist guest for an evening of cocktails and – what Boston does best – brilliant conversation. Additionally, we felt that at most biennales and art world exhibitions, the parties—rightly or wrongly—become as much the focus of the exhibitions as the works themselves. Thus, in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, we cut straight to the proverbial chase.

I feel that this is the essence of TransCultural Exchange: We use art to bring people together from disparate fields and far-flung parts of the globe to meet one another, make friends and spark conversations that will last long after the individual conferences and projects are over.

Obviously such large undertakings that span globe would be unimaginable without the help of a

large number of people. I am greatly indebted to TransCultural Exchange's board, who provide moral support and guidance throughout, followed by a remarkable advisory board and all the speakers, moderators and volunteers who have come from near and far to be with us for our conference. Most of all, though, would like to thank the literally hundreds of artists and organizations TransCultural Exchange has worked with over the more than two decades of our existence. It is their work, inspiration and kindness that make my job a joy. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all our generous sponsors, who enabled us to produce such undertakings.

My sincere thanks,

Mary Sherman  
TransCultural Exchange  
Director