December 2011

Notes from the staff

Season's greetings from the Peacebuilding and the Arts Program at the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life at Brandeis University. We hope this newsletter finds you well as we are nearing the end of the year. 2011 will be remembered for the earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the nuclear disaster whose proportions will likely become apparent only over generations. This has also been the year of uprisings seeking democracy and economic justice in the Arab world, the United States and elsewhere.

For us, 2011 will always be remembered as the year when we launched the Acting Together anthology, documentary and toolkit. We keep thinking about what Polly Walker said in our documentary film:

“Sometimes I think I’m working with these groups of people, and there’s so few, you know, and we’re so scattered, and then I realize, ‘No, that work is going on in Peru, and it’s going on in Cambodia, and it’s going on in the prisons in New Orleans’.....We’re not alone, we’re not just these tiny, tiny flames, we’re a pretty powerful fire.”

We like this image and we hope that Acting Together resources spark creativity and commitment to social transformation in communities around the globe.

During the global launch of the Acting Together project in the fall, we screened our documentary film, “Acting Together on the World Stage” in eight countries including Cambodia, Kenya, New Zealand, South Africa and South Korea. Thanks to Betsy Plumb, our launch coordinator, and to all those who helped with launch screenings and other events. Betsy completed her work at the Center in December. We will miss her and we wish her well as she completes her doctoral degree.

Just this month, Volume II of “Acting Together: Performance and Creative Transformation of Conflict” was published. We were excited to receive our copies and to know that this resource
will now be available for educators, practitioners and funders in both the arts and peacebuilding. Thanks to all those contributors who wrote chapters and to those who have been instrumental in the entire “Acting Together” project.

The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life hosted a symposium at Brandeis, *Just Performance: Enacting Justice in the Wake of Violence*, on December 1 and 2. Many contributors to the Acting Together project were there, including Dr. Salomón Lerner Febres, former president of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru, who wrote the foreword to Volume II of the anthology, and delivered the symposium’s keynote address. An initial report is available online.

This fall we began to explore the possibilities for an infrastructure for the emerging field of peacebuilding and the arts. Many readers of this newsletter responded to a survey. You can now read the report with preliminary results.

We look forward to connecting with you during 2012.

Best wishes for the holiday season,

*Cindy and Naoe*

Cynthia E. Cohen, Ph.D., Director  
Naoe Suzuki, Senior Program Coordinator  
Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts

**Acting Together Global Launch: Creating a powerful fire together**

In a film archive in Phnom Pehn, an art education center in Johannesburg, and a theater in Los Angeles, artists and peacebuilders joined a global conversation. During the fall of 2011, the Peacebuilding and the Arts Program joined with ReCAST, Inc. and New Village Press to launch the Acting Together project. The documentary “*Acting Together on the World Stage*” was screened by partners who welcomed to the conversation students and community members eager to learn more about peacebuilding artists and their efforts around the world. The gatherings also encouraged peacebuilding practitioners to continue to pursue and develop… [Read more](#)
Featured Artist: "Esse Quam Videri"

Todd Drake is a community-based artist who has worked with Muslim people in North Carolina and Manama, Bahrain to create self-portraits. People of the Muslim faith from a variety of backgrounds and living in a variety of communities participated in this project by working collaboratively with Drake to realize their own visions. The results are rich, and these portraits offer a fresh take on what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary society, and question the public perception of Muslims that is shaped by the mainstream media.

The artist speaks:
What inspired you to do the Muslim Self-Portrait Project? Was it political, cultural, artistic, or a mixture of them all?
“Four years ago, when I started this project, I was worried that the Muslim community in the United States would suffer the same fate as Japanese-Americans during WWII …” Read more from Drake’s interview in “Cultural Diplomacy News.”

News from the Field

Yoga and Dance for Peacebuilding in Colombia
In Colombia, ex-paramilitary and guerrilla army members who have given up their weapons are trying their hand at yoga. Maria Adelaida Lopez and Natalia Quinones started Dunna - Creative Alternatives for Peace (Corporación Dunna-alternativas creativas para la paz), a nonprofit organization that helps people heal from the scars and trauma of a century of armed conflict and learn how to communicate effectively … Read more.

Afghan Theatre Group Lets War Victims Tell Their Stories
November 7, Inter-Press Service. On a small stage, a woman appears, grief written on her face as she wanders through the streets of Kabul searching for her missing child. Suddenly, she stops by a scene of ruins and stares... Read more.

Museum of the Unspeakable: Breaking through the chain of violence
Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Eugene van Erven, contributor to “Acting Together: Performance and Creative Transformation of Conflict, Vol. II,” sent us this news from the community art lab. Brent Blair, a student of Augusto Boal, works with victims to break through the chain of violence with a theatre technique using the methods of theater of the oppressed. As Director of Applied Theatre Arts at the University of Southern California, Blair’s Museum of the Unspeakable technique aims to break the silence about “unspeakable” traumas through theatre in a
collective, supportive environment. On October 28, Blair hosted a workshop on post-genocide healing through theater at Utrecht University. In the process, each participant is paired with a partner who copies his or her posture in a retelling of the participant’s lived experience, to allow the participant to step outside him or herself to observe and investigate. Blair emphasizes that the goal is not simply art, but a method of expression that does not require explanation … Read more & Watch the video.

Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts in the Media

The Transformative Power of Art in Peacebuilding
“Art is not what one sees but what one can make others see.”
With this quote from painter Edgard Degas, Sheldon Himmelfarb, Director at the Center of Innovation at United States Institute for Peace (USIP) opened the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum on art and peacebuilding. The first panelist was Cynthia Cohen, Director of the Peacebuilding and the Arts program at the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life at Brandeis University. Cohen argued that theater can contribute to conflict transformation for several reasons: it can engage the people ecstatically; it connects… Read more.

Musical Presentation by Jane Sapp Opens the Peacebuilding and the Arts Weekend Intensive at Brandeis
Friday, October 21, Jane Sapp, singer-songwriter, storyteller and educator, began her presentation by sitting at the piano and playing a few simple blues chords before letting the music capture everyone in the audience. Soon, her soulful rendition of "This Little Light of Mine" filled Brandeis University’s Slosberg Music Hall… Read more.

Boston Premiere of "Acting Together on the World Stage" – Evening showcases importance of performing arts in peacebuilding
Artists, peacebuilders, students and educators gathered in October at Distler Performance Hall for the Boston premiere of "Acting Together on the World Stage," a documentary about artistic groups around the world who use creativity in the performing arts to address conflict resolution... Read more.

BBC Radio Arts Extra Interview, Northern Ireland
Interview with Dr. Cynthia Cohen and Dijana Milošević about the Irish premiere of "Acting Together on the World Stage" in Derry and Belfast and the cultural work in the region. Listen now.

Resources
Visit our online Resource Library
The resources in this online library are related to the work of the Peacebuilding and the Arts program and Brandeis University’s International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, and our collaborators and networks.

Strengthening Work at the Nexus of the Arts and Peacebuilding: Preliminary Report on Survey
The Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University conducted an online survey about priorities for strengthening work at the nexus of arts and peacebuilding. Between October 25 and November 2, 132 people completed the survey online; about half identify themselves as artists and cultural workers, and about half as peacebuilders. By far, most respondents conceptualize work at the nexus of peacebuilding and the arts as either 'a field' or 'an emerging field.' In prioritizing the kinds of resources that would be most helpful… Read the preliminary report.

Assessing Excellence in Peacebuilding and the Arts
Questions of evaluation and assessment are challenges to the field of peacebuilding and the arts. This month, MaryAnn Hunter joined Cynthia Cohen in presenting the Acting Together project as a form of evaluation of peacebuilding performance at an “evidence summit” sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace and the Alliance for Peacebuilding. In preparation, we posted one of the elements of the Acting Together toolkit, “Analysis and Assessment in Peacebuilding Performance,” on our YouTube channel.

Master's Programs in Coexistence and Conflict at Brandeis University
Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University
The programs focus on the challenges posed by intercommunal and societal conflicts in today's world. Their vision is to bring greater professional policy and practical expertise and leadership to bear upon these challenges. Learn more about the programs.

New Release!

Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict
Volume II: Building Just and Inclusive Communities
Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts
International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life
Brandeis University
415 South Street | MS 086 | Waltham, MA 02454-9110

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