

2009 NALAC TCR Project Narrative

Applicant Name: Walls of Hope

Project Name: Walls of Hope: Guatemala

1. Walls of Hope is an international art and human rights project that uses collaborative and community based art -making, education, diplomacy and community development to support survivors of state terror in areas of the world that recently suffered armed conflicts and are transiting a post war period.

Walls of Hope was created in 2005 by Claudia Bernardi, an Argentine artist and human rights activist who works in installations, sculpture and printmaking, as well as dance, theatre and spoken word collaborations. Bernardi has worked for more than 20 years designing art-in-community projects for political refugees and survivors of torture throughout Latin America. Recently, she has focused on art-in-community projects in countries at war or in postwar periods. Ms. Bernardi has also worked with the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, exhuming mass graves in El Salvador, Guatemala and Ethiopia.

Claudia Bernardi has lectured extensively throughout the world on the theme of art praxis as a component of community building and the reinforcement of social justice. She has published articles and created innovative university courses and curricula exploring what it means to be an artist at the beginning of the 21st Century.

At the heart of Walls of Hope is The School of Art and Open Studios of Perquín, opened in March of 2005. The community of Perquín consists of about 4,000 people located in Morazán, El Salvador. The School of Art and Open Studios is the first art education program established in the region and the only art organization of its kind in the Americas. Perquín is less than five miles from the site of the El Mozote massacre where in December 1981 nearly 1,000 unarmed children, women and men were killed by the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion, backed by the Salvadoran government. In 1992, Claudia Bernardi, as part of the Argentine Forensic Archaeological Team, helped exhume many of the victims of what has been called one of the worst atrocities in modern Latin American history. Her experiences at El Mozote have influenced her personal and public work ever since.

The School of Art and Open Studios was founded and operates based on the wishes of the community. It employs art making as a way to nurture diplomacy, cultural exchange and community building in an area torn apart by 12 years of civil war and the catastrophic economic situation that ensued. The mandate of the school is to create collaborations and exchanges through art classes, public art projects and site-specific interventions. The School's goal is to encourage education, diplomacy, community development and the recovery of historic memory in communities impacted by war.

The School of Art and Open Studios is open free of charge to all inhabitants of Perquín. Children, youth, adults and the elderly are involved in art projects that expand from collaborative mural painting to public and urban art. The School offers classes in painting, drawing, printmaking, wood sculpture, mural painting and the history of art. International artists and scholars have participated as artists in residence to work in partnership with the members of the community of Perquín.

In addition to her role as director of Walls of Hope and The School of Art and Open Studios, Ms. Bernardi travels extensively as an artist-in-residence and lecturer and is also a tenured faculty member of the California College of Arts. Since 2006, four Salvadoran artists/teachers (America Argentina Vaquerano Romero, Claudia Verence Flores Escolero and Rosa Del Carmen Argueta and Rigoberto Rodriquez Martinez) have managed the daily operations of the school as well as taught classes. These

artists do not have traditional resumes at this point since they are members of the community who have stepped forward to manage the school (mostly pro-bono, due to funding constraints).

Ms. Bernardi is expanding “The Perquín Model” beyond The School of Art and Open Studios in Perquín and creating similar art and human rights projects internationally. In the past two years, Bernardi has facilitated projects in other areas of El Salvador as well as in Guatemala (Huhuetenango, Rabinal, Cobán and Guatemala City). She has been asked to facilitate a project in Cocorná, Medellín, Colombia later this year. (Ms. Bernardi also facilitated a project in Toronto, Canada last year which included students from Latin America refugee families). Through the Perquín Model, children, youth, adults and the elderly gather to tell their stories and design art projects which collect their historic memory and exchange their communal truth. The Perquín Model is:

- A community based project that engages children, youth and adults in the creation of art that serves as a component of community building and cross cultural exchange
- A project created with the understanding that there has been trauma, violence and prejudice inflicted on the participants through political duress, state terror, wars and armed conflict
- The participants decide on the theme and narrative of their work with the intention to produce a visual testimony of recent history
- A collaborative art project that expands from creativity towards diplomacy, judicial concerns and the demand for the respect for social and human rights.

In addition to expanding throughout Latin America, Walls of Hope’s Perquín Model has become part of the university courses Bernardi teaches at the California College of the Arts as a Professor of Community Arts. Bernardi has brought students from the California College of the Arts (CCA) to Perquín to experience first hand an international art program with a history of community activism and collaborative art making. Students from CCA journey to Perquín in 2005, 2006 and 2007 as part of the college’s Summer Abroad Program to learn strategies and skills to create and develop community art projects. In February 2009, Bernardi also led a trip to El Salvador (“Witnessing the Peace Process”) for students at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia.

The Walls of Hope projects in Latin America continually inform Ms. Bernardi’s work with North American students. These university students (some from Latin American families or immigrants themselves) investigate the success and challenges of the work created in Latin America. They study the methodology implemented in these projects and investigate how the “blue print” of the interaction between art and social justice can be further transported to the United States where they are finding their voices as artists in communities.

2. Drawing on the methods of collective recollection and art making that Claudia Bernardi developed in Perquín, Walls of Hope: Guatemala is an on-going effort that works with survivors of state terror in Guatemala. The focus of Walls of Hope: Guatemala is the creation of visual documentation of survival of state terror. Funding is requested to create and document a new collaborative work by a team composed of experienced and first-time artists from El Salvador, Guatemala and Argentina. Although from different Latin American countries and cultures, all share the experience of surviving civil strife and violence.

3. Walls of Hope: Guatemala’s purpose is to bring greater awareness of the threads of Latin America’s history of civil strife through town meetings, through the telling of stories and the planning of collaborative art interventions and public art pieces that recover historic memory. The project’s goal is to encourage and share life-affirming skills in the arts and practical expertise and leadership to better to prevent, manage and resolve such conflicts.

4. Walls of Hope has been invited by the Guatemalan human rights agency ECAP (Equipo de Capacitación y de Ayuda Psicosocial/Community Studies Team and Psychosocial Action) to work once again with survivors of massacres, with survivors of torture and survivors of rape suffered during 40 years of armed conflict in Guatemala.

ECAP decides which communities are most ready and whether the political reality of each situation is appropriate to do this kind of work. Walls of Hope and ECAP have been planning a project in Panzos, Alta Verapaz, and have been waiting for the timing to be right and for funding to become available. The details of the Panzos massacre are all-too familiar: On May 29, 1978, members of the Guatemalan army shot indiscriminately into a crowd of Maya Kekchi campesinos who had gathered in the town square of Panzos, Alta Verapaz, to express demands for land. With 53 dead and another 47 wounded, it was one of the army's first major assaults of the civil war era (the 1960s to 1990s) against a civilian population, fueled by a racism that equated "Indian" with "subversive" and became an integral part of the state's counterinsurgency mentality.

Walls of Hope has worked with ECAP in Guatemala several times already. In January 2008, Walls of Hope was invited to work on a collaborative, community-based project with people from ECAP and several other human rights agencies in Guatemala City at a workshop on "muralism." This initiative brought together a group of 25 people including social psychologists, social workers and human rights activists. The participants had never made art previously, but everyone had been moved by the work created the previous year and was willing to partake in this new endeavor.

Also in 2008, Walls of Hope worked with survivors of massacres from Ixil, Ixcán, Chajul, Nebaj, Chimaltenango and Rabinal. A large-scale mural was painted on canvas at ECAP headquarters in Guatemala City. The 35 participants used art to collect and preserve their personal history as well as the historic communal memory of violations of human rights and state terror. The completed mural travelled to the different communities from where the participants were from.

In August 2008, Walls of Hope facilitated the project, "Recovering Historic Memory with Indigenous Women Survivors of Sexual Violence in Guatemala." Again at ECAP's invitation, Walls of Hope worked with 30 indigenous women survivors of sexual violence during armed conflict. Salvadoran artists, Claudia Verence Flores Escolero, Rosa del Carmen Argueta and Rigoberto Rodríguez Martínez from The School of Art and Open Studios in Perquín, accompanied Claudia Bernardi to Huehuetenango. In November 2008, the women who painted the mural presented it at the University of San Carlos. In front of an audience of 300 people they talked about their personal histories, explained what the mural depicted and why it was urgent for all Guatemalans not to forget what had taken place during the years of armed conflict. In 2009, the mural was exhibited at the National Palace, the government house for the president.

In February 2009, again at the invitation of ECAP, Walls of Hope facilitated "Shaping our History," a sculpture project in Purulá with 35 Q'eqchies women, all survivors of sexual violence. Also in February 2009, Walls of Hope worked with survivors of torture and massacres in Rabinal, Plan de Sánchez, Río Negro, Ixil, Ixcán, Nebaj and Chimaltenango. Thirty-five men and women worked on the mural, "The Journey Towards Justice."

In 2009, Walls of Hope was invited to work on two more projects in Guatemala. In Cobán a group of 100 women survivors of sexual violence created a soft sculpture project based on their experiences, memories and demands towards a judicial process against the perpetrators. In Panzos, 35 men and women, all survivors of torture, created a collaborative mural about the successes and failures of the Peace Process.

The mural is expected to be the central piece of an upcoming conference (scheduled for September 2009) on Human Rights in Guatemala.

Artists from El Salvador and Guatemala have and will work together to explore and express their experiences with state terror. In addition to the fact that Spanish is not the first language of all who participate (many speak Indigenous languages), it is apparent that in Guatemala, quite different from in El Salvador, the silence of the victims is noticeable. Guatemalan people are much more reserved, a lot more careful when they choose to speak, less willing to share their thoughts or their feelings. Art making brings into the open the Guatemalan experiences and creates a bridge that unites the Salvadoran and Guatemalan shared stories.

5. Walls of Hope intends to continue developing alliance and partnerships through community based art projects with participants affected by state terror, violence and war. The mural project in Panzos, Alta Verapaza will create a community based mural and a project of reconciliation, since in Panzos, like in El Mozote in 2006, the community is polarized. The painting of the mural will be more than “painting a pretty picture” on a public space. It is the creation of a new venue for diplomacy and a new way to remember what happened in that community. At the very minimum, the experience will be used to create new courses at California College of the Arts, Mary Baldwin College and Santa Clara University (within the Justice and Art Initiative). With adequate funding, a photography exhibition could be created and exhibited among indigenous communities in Guatemala, El Salvador and in the US. In addition, Walls of Hope has a video camera, but funding would be used for film and for an editor to assemble the footage into a final product.

6. One of the most significant successes of Walls of Hope is the fact that the School of Art and Open Studios in Perquin can now be operated entirely by community members year-round. As noted, prior to the founding of The School of Art and Open Studios, there were no art programs in the region. The Guatemalan psychosocial workers, lawyers and human rights activist involved in Walls of Hope’s work in Guatemala have stated that the art projects created during the last two years are the most successful, most integrated communal activity ever done with and for the victims who suffered violence and state terror.

7. Funding will support round trip travel for five teachers from El Salvador to Guatemala, per diems, art materials as well as documentation of the project. Claudia Bernardi will donate her salary as an in-kind contribution to the project. Funding will provide small stipends to the four Salvadorian teachers: America Argentina Vaquerano Romero, Claudia Verence Flores Escolero and Rosa Del Carmen Argueta and Rigoberto Rodriguez Martinez.

8. Walls of Hope is a fiscally sponsored project of Intersection for the Arts, a San Francisco-based 501c3. This proposal was reviewed and approved by staff from Intersection for the Arts. Walls of Hope is currently building a board of advisors to give support, expertise and guidance to its mission and projects, including Tapestry of History. As of July 2009, the following have joined Walls of Hope’s advisory board and support Walls of Hope’s continued work in Guatemala: **Mark Danner**, Writer and author, Professor, University of California at Berkeley and Bard College, author of *The Massacre of El Mozote*; **Moria Roth**, Trefethen Professor of Art History at Mills College, Oakland, CA. **Kim Curry-Evans**, Director, 40 Acres Gallery, Sacramento, CA; **Lucero Arellano**, California Arts Council; **Carolyn Silberman** and **Kristin Kusunovich**, Justice and the Arts Initiative, Santa Clara University, CA; **Todd Jailer** and **David Coady**, San Carlos Foundation; **Drea Howenstein**, Associate Professor, Art Education; Architecture, Interior Architecture and Designed Object, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; **Heather H. Ward**, Director of International Programs at the Spencer Center for Civic and Global Engagement at Mary Baldwin College.