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Art for Social Change

EVERY SUNDAY SINCE November 2011, Luis Enrique Corvera Orellana, 13, and his brother José Gilberto, 15, have made the long trip from their little hamlet of El Jiote in Usulután, to Chirilagua in the department of San Miguel. In Chirilagua, they meet up with some friends and take a bus provided by the local mayor's office to the Casa de la Cultura in Intipucá. Luis Enrique and José Gilberto are part of group of 60 Salvadoran children and youth from Ciudad Victoria, Chirilagua, Sensuntepeque, and Intipucá who are putting their creative juices to work participating in a program created by two museums to use art as a medium for change and progress.

Two Museums, Two Nations, One Identity is the name of the program. It offers a series of photography and painting workshops focused on strengthening personal and collective identity and on helping participants feel more connected to their common cultural heritage. The OAS Art

Museum of the Americas (AMA) and the Art Museum of El Salvador (MARTE) are the main sponsors of this program in which the two museums become a public good at the service of the community. The program's goal is to create the habit and appreciation of extracurricular activities that will keep participants off the streets and away from risky behavior in the long term. It also teaches tools that can be applied in academic and work environments.

This initiative is also an artistic exchange that involves a community of youth from Washington DC who are mostly of Salvadoran descent. They are from Columbia Heights, a neighborhood in northern DC that has had a large influx of Salvadoran immigrants over the years since the 1970s. The AMA invited the Corcoran College of Art and Design to choose ten photography students to give workshops to these

participants in DC. The Corcoran students then had an opportunity to give similar courses in El Salvador in March 2012.

An exchange between the two museums and the two communities is an essential part of the program. It happens through a series of teleconferences and a social network called *Edmodo*, widely used for educational programs. With *Edmodo*, participants in both countries exchange ideas, stories, and information about their work. Some are able to connect up from school or from their homes, while others wait until the weekend to connect from the Casa de Cultura.

The program, which is being funded by the US State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the American Association of Museums (AAM), will end in June 2012 with bi-national exhibits of the work of the participants in the AMA and MARTE programs.

Two Museums, Two Nations, One Identity is part of a new AMA strategy that responds to the political and social agenda of OAS member countries and operates under the principle that the arts are a transformative force for

Student involved in the Two Museums, Two Nations, One Identity program in El Salvador use artistic exchange to promote creativity and dialogue

individuals and communities. The strategy is to transform the museum into a forum for cultural expression and communication, addressing topics like development, human rights, justice, and freedom of expression. This all happens through local and hemispheric artistic exchanges that promote creativity, dialogue, and new ideas.

The AMA is different from other modern art museums in that it promotes social change through creative expression and social action initiatives like the program with the MARTE museum in El Salvador and the Orchestra Program for at-risk youth in Haiti, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia, which has been working since 2009 to reduce factors that lead to violent behavior and to teach civic values in order to increase school attendance levels and provide tools for the labor market.

—Andrés Navia



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