

Paintings for Peace and Paintings for Harmony – UN 15 Oct 2012 Exhibit opening function, GA Delegates Entrance

- **Ms. Jacqueline Terrassa, Managing Museum Educator, for Gallery and Studio Programs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.**
- **Mr. Kurt A. Behrendt, Assistant Curator at Metropolitan Museum of Art**

Nilima Silver: We are now very honoured to have with us: *Jacqueline* Terrassa, who is the Managing *Museum. Educator*, for Gallery and Studio Programs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And she has agreed to share a few words with us.

Jacqueline Terrassa:

It is really and honour and a pleasure to be here with you and I want to thank you for the invitation and I want to thank you for the important work that you do every day.

I want to begin with a question that I was asked to address tonight. And I want you to think about it for a moment. And it is a big question which is “What do art museums do to contribute to world peace and cultural understanding?” think about that for a moment and perhaps if I went around the room all of you would have a variety of different answers or perhaps you would stare at me somewhat blankly. But I think it is a very, very important question and have been thinking about it quite a bit. It really is at the heart of what we do every day at the museum., what we do in our education programs and at the heart of why the metropolitan museum was founded.

In the last month alone 1,100 educators from 46 countries engaged each other in dialogue as they explored the MET’s encyclopaedic collections. This took place during 2 webinars that resulted form a collaboration with the State Department (USA). Last winter inspired by the MET’s exhibition heroic Africans, legendary leaders, iconic sculptors, 300 people reflected on the role that oral traditions play in different African cultures. As they listened to a conversation [between the young Nigerian Author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and a NY times reporter Helen Cooper](#)



(<http://youtu.be/EB1WqZiGclA>).

Weeks later more than 60 teens from the five boroughs of the New York City area as well as beyond gathered at the MET inspired by and exhibition of Italian Renaissance. They compared their own views about identity, about beauty, their ideas bout power; to the ideas of beauty and power in the

Italian Renaissance.

And week after week families learn about Art and life of civilizations close to them and far away from them as they explore the museum during our free programmes. During these programs children and their adult companions practice the art of slowing down, of noticing more closely and asking questions about what they see. I hope that they leave the museum more curious and with a bigger picture of the world than when they arrived.

But the answer to this question: “How do museums contribute to world peace and cultural understanding?; which might seem somewhat preposterous, is actually quite personal. From a participant in one of our recent community programs, someone who is a former refugee and who arrived from Eritrea only weeks ago, it is very simple. His name Kiplaung, and he said to us: “you know why I love art? All creatures in the world they see, all creatures in the world they observe.”

The kinds of challenges you address every day on a global scale; from political crises, to hunger, to housing for refugees; and the kinds of dilemmas, joys and questions that each of us pose to ourselves everyday as we go about our lives: these are the reasons we need our museums, such as the MET. We need places for encounter, for inspiration and for reflection.

The MET opened 140 years ago, as an encyclopaedic museum. And today millions of people from all over the world visit us to see what other people have made across time and across place. In our galleries they see: Egyptian statues of Pharaohs, they see tapestries from medieval France, they see photographs made by American artists in the 1930’s. They see paintings made by Pablo Picasso. They see paintings made by contemporary Iranian artists; they see ceremonial masks from the Congo and marble sculptures from Greece. What our galleries offer everyone is an opportunity to find our story in our collections and at the same time to understand ourselves a little better in relation to the world around us. As a Puerto Rican family from Hoboken said at a recent festival of Hispanic and Latin American culture that we presented: “I love the fact that it brings many cultures together”.

It is in our galleries that we can also unpack what is taking place in Libya, in China, in Pakistan or right here in NY City. By coming face to face with an incredible object that another person made. We are reminded of the humanity that underlies all culture. We also come to know cultures different than our own from perspectives we have not considered before. And we learn about religious and social practices which are quite unlike ours but are motivated by the same desires and impulses that you and I are moved by. And we do all this in the company of others. In the company of loved ones who come to us for a visit or in the company of strangers who like us chose to see art that day, at that hour. And that too is very powerful. The MET is for everyone and I hope that you too find excitement, inspiration and a space for reflection in our galleries. So, please visit us sometime soon. Thank you for inviting me to come.

Nilima Silver

Thank you very much, I was actually privileged to visit the Picasso exhibition last June, which was thrilling. The good work that you are doing is indescribable.

Nilima Silver: We are also fortunate to have with us another of your colleagues from the Metropolitan museum of Art, Kurt A. Behrendt, Assistant Curator at Metropolitan Museum of Art. We are very happy that you have agreed to address us this evening.

Kurt A. Behrendt, , Assistant Curator at Metropolitan Museum of Art :

I deeply feel that it is central to our mission and relates well to your mission, is the idea that one can go into a space and see an object. I think these paintings make the point beautifully. And in a sense thru an aesthetic appreciation, of something, across culture and across language you find a commonality. And this at one level allows you to project something of the past. I think this is the simplest and most direct thing that most people do. They imagine: I am looking at something 2000 years old, and I wonder what the person was thinking when they produced it. And maybe we can't know, but certainly we can resonate with this : that they were producing something that does transcend time and culture, and allows you access to that person as a human being. And this in the modern world has the same kind of meaning. In a sense can use art to cross culture.

I recently remember bringing a group of first graders, from a NY public school. We wandered around the museum. We were looking at clay, because they all like clay. And I was struck as we went through the galleries, how these kids from all over the world said : Oh that's from where my parents are from. They recognized these cultures. And yet these objects are using a sort of language of form. It allowed a sense of free discourse across time and space. I think the museum is a unique place in being able to offer that. I think all of us, I hope the UN takes advantage of these vehicles. I think the Metropolitan has striven to make this a reality, and to try to have that breath of inclusiveness for the whole world.

Of course, this is a complicated thing. I again think of these first graders, and their innocence and their sort of appreciation for something that truly was transcendent and beautiful, and how they related to it. I think all of us have the potential to be able to do that in way that we might not in another context.

I work on South Asia; I have devoted my life to the study of South Asia and spent my time in many regions. And yet there is always this object that one can refer to as something that pulls that region together, and is inclusive. With that I will say I appreciate you and having an opportunity to speak to all of you. ..
