

Cities of Peace Auschwitz Initiative: “Honoring the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz”

*Inaugurating the Cities of Peace Commemorative Series
Visual Arts, Education and Cultural Diplomacy*

Introduction

Cities of Peace Auschwitz is a peacebuilding and healing initiative involving local Polish artists and scholars in the creation of a collaborative monumental gold-illuminated work of art to honor the **75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz**.

Cities of Peace was conceived and developed by visionary founder and artist Ellen Frank, PhD. In 2018 she was awarded the title of Fulbright Specialist in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation by the US Department of State’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs for her work in Kosovo.

The 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz provides a historic occasion for implementing this initiative in Poland. Cities of Peace is forward-looking, we seek to foster engaged and active citizenship that recognizes, respects and celebrates the multi-ethnic, multi-religious world in which we live. Cities of Peace Auschwitz will bring together American, Israeli, German, Russian and Polish participants in a shared enterprise involving the **visual arts, education and cultural diplomacy**.

In 2015, Cities of Peace was selected to exhibit its smaller collection at the 70th Commemoration of the Liberation of Auschwitz at the House of Silence, International Youth Meeting Center (IYMC). A roundtable of noted Polish artists, invited by IYMC, laid the groundwork for the current project by convening co-sponsors of the project, the Auschwitz Foundation, and the Judaica Foundation. The roundtable resulted in compelling interest from the artists and an invitation from the Mayor of Oswiecim for Cities of Peace to return to Auschwitz for 2020. Upon return to Auschwitz, together with the Polish artists, Cities of Peace will create and unveil a collaborative monumental painting honoring the Liberation. Fundamentally, Cities of Peace will launch an education program to help counter the global rise in antisemitism, islamophobia, racism and destructive nationalism.

This project is modeled on the successful Cities of Peace Initiative in Pristina, Kosovo, in 2018, in which Cities of Peace US built a Consortium including the **University of Prishtina**, the **Museum of Kosovo**, and the NGO **Cultural Heritage without Borders**. Led by Dr. Ellen Frank, the Consortium engaged local, regional, national and international artists, scholars, students and youth participants in a comprehensive research-based collaborative art project. Through the assistance from the US Embassy in Pristina, Cities of Peace was inclusive, uniting Kosovo Albanians with minority populations – Serbs, Roma, Ashkali Egyptians, and women victims of war crimes. The US Embassy live-streamed the Kosovo project, reaching over 28,000 views. More than 300 direct participants engaged in painting, peacebuilding and human rights education and included children from 38 municipalities in Kosovo. For this work, Cities of Peace received an Award for Excellence by NATO and KFOR.

“I am pleased to join American artist, Dr. Ellen Frank, at the Museum of Kosovo, together with a wonderful group of young people from cities from all over Kosovo to participate in this work of art, which is spectacular. I am so happy that Ellen came here to create a ‘Cities of Peace’ painting for Pristina as she has done at so many other important cities around the world. I am also happy to see the enthusiasm of young artists working on this terrific work of art. They are an important contribution to this great project, which helps to promote peace.”

—US AMBASSADOR GREG DELAWIE, PRISTINA, KOSOVO, 2018



Cities of Peace exhibit at Guild Hall, East Hampton NY

Background

Cities of Peace is:

- A collection of collaborative monumental gold-illuminated paintings honoring the history and culture of cities that have experienced major conflict and trauma: Baghdad, Beijing, Hiroshima, Jerusalem, Kabul, Lhasa, Monrovia, New York, Pristina, Sarajevo and Yerevan. The works transform anguish into beauty, and celebrate the best of the human spirit without violence or polemics. The Cities of Peace collection emphasizes understanding as a prerequisite to peace;
- Peacebuilding and Human Rights Education through direct engagement in the Visual Arts
- Cultural Diplomacy
- The flagship initiative of the Ellen Frank Illumination Arts Foundation, Inc. a 501 (c)(3) global organization founded in 2004 dedicated to building a culture of understanding and peace through the transformative power of collaborative art-making with artists, students, scholars and institutions from more than 25 countries;

Cities of Peace Core Values:

- A belief in the critical role of cities in sustaining what is creative and hopeful in civilization
- Art and culture help prevent the destruction of civilization, protect cities and rekindle the human spirit
- Cultural diplomacy, peacebuilding and leadership training are essential to the future.

Since 2015, Cities of Peace has created a model for its international engagement, exemplified by our work in Pristina, Kosovo. The Kosovo Project provided opportunities for participants to establish teamwork with former enemies and engaged otherwise marginalized youth. The collaboration built pride and leadership, active citizenship, and engagement with organizations and institutions with which participants were previously unfamiliar. Most of all, it built a loving, mutually supportive community among former strangers, even enemies. This affirmed democratic values of equality, respect for the rights of the individual, civic engagement, and optimism.

The more than 300 direct participants included such individuals as: His Eminence The President of Kosovo, the US Ambassador, leaders from the ministries of Culture, Education, Foreign Affairs, Director of UNDP, international guests visiting the museum, NATO soldiers, members of Rotary International, diplomats and residents of Kosovo – families from toddlers to great grandmothers. Dr. Frank gave guest lectures in such university departments as Fine Arts, International Relations, Economics, Architecture, English and American Literature, and more.

Dr. Frank holds an interdisciplinary doctorate in Literature and the Visual Arts from Stanford University with studies at Yale, the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes in London and an Honorary Doctorate from Russian-Armenian University for Cities of Peace. She has been the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship, and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Ford Foundation and a Pollock-Krasner Award in Painting. Dr. Frank co-founded the first interdisciplinary department at UC Berkeley.



*Albanian with Serb minority
students working together
surmounting differences*

The Project

The Auschwitz Commemorative Painting is a forward-facing, peacebuilding and healing initiative. The project is exemplified by art-making as a transformational and universal language; education for meaningful sustainable outcomes; and cultural diplomacy for nourishing relationships that help build peace.

Visual Arts

Painting is the language through which we speak peace.

The creation of a monumental painting in a team setting is the foundation of each Cities of Peace project. The Auschwitz painting will have its grand unveiling on January 26, 2020 at Palac Sztuki, as part of the international commemorative ceremonies marking the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. Other exhibition venues may include the Polen Museum, Warsaw; Bundestag, Berlin; and United Nations Headquarters, New York. Once the project is complete, the painting joins the Cities of Peace Collection, accessible through virtual exhibition, and as part of the international traveling exhibition of the entire Collection.

Working under the educational and artistic guidance of Dr. Frank, participants research the chosen city, including its architecture, language, and symbols; develop concept and design; and together as a team create a large format commemorative painting illuminated with gold leaf. We guide participants in collaboration, non-oppositional thinking, non-violent communication, and therefore recognize, discuss and mark the memories of love and pain from the past. The creation of the painting harnesses participation and skills in research, interviewing, discussion and interdisciplinary brainstorming. These activities, enacted through the act of painting, can make interethnic reconciliation actually work, as participants jointly envision a city's future. Cities of Peace is an invitation for visiting, cooperating and exchanging experiences and cultures.

Invited participants include artists and scholars from throughout Poland, especially those living in the shadow of Auschwitz-Birkenau; those of German, Russian, Israeli nationality or descent; and people of all faiths and identities including those from all minority groups persecuted at Auschwitz.

In addition to the peacebuilding aspects of the work, participants gain an artistic skill: the art of gold-leaf illumination. The ancient art of illumination –once practiced worldwide by artists of all the world's religions – involves the use of varieties of precious metals to represent the divine, and to embody light and hope in a work of art.

By bridging ethnic and religious diversity and national identity through a collaborative art project, the program seeks to counter the global rise in antisemitism, islamophobia, racism, and destructive forms of nationalism. Cities of Peace opens a space for intercultural dialog to foster a sense of community accountability.



Hard at work in Pristina
transferring city map

Education

Cities of Peace Education through the Visual Arts is an extension of the Cities of Peace painting project.

The program is designed for museums and cultural institutions, ministries of Education, schools from secondary through higher education. Based on the participatory, interdisciplinary, hands-on arts program in peacebuilding and leadership developed in the making of the monumental paintings, the curriculum extends the program beyond the boundaries of the main project. Crucially, the curriculum includes training in the painting techniques, alongside the concepts and language of non-oppositional thinking and non-violent communication, which help develop an active sense of global responsibility, capacity for conflict resolution, reconciliation and community building.

This curriculum is replicable, flexible, and resilient to cultural needs.

Cultural Diplomacy

Painting together is an act of dynamic diplomacy.

Cities of Peace uses art-making as a doorway to build a global culture of peace and understanding. Cities of Peace can help counter violent extremism through artistic engagement, collaboration, fostering leadership, and global citizenship.

Art as a language transcends borders, language and culture. Art reminds us that we have a common human foundation; this diplomacy is sustained through the collaborative learning community built throughout the painting and education programs. On the occasion of the Commemoration, Cities of Peace utilizes art as a tool of cultural diplomacy to recognize the suffering of all people persecuted under Nazism or oppressed by other occupying forces.

Outcomes

The outcome of the Initiative is the collaborative work of art alongside educational and community programming for lasting impact.

- Provide up to 30 workshops or lectures (live or live streamed) to schools and cultural organizations.
- Create multiple Cities of Peace clubs and virtual communities through paired American and Polish secondary schools, colleges and universities.
- Engage no fewer than 300 participants including artists, students, educators and scholars in the process of peacebuilding through the arts
- Reach no fewer than 30,000 people by live streaming the creative process
- Provide an opportunity for US Consular staff to interact with local artists and scholars
- Model Intercultural Education
- Empower women participants in particular, building dignity and leadership skills
- Foster compassionate societies through humanitarian work with an emphasis on understanding religious, ethnic, and national differences