

## WFWP USA: Art Touches Heart: Embracing the Power of Creative Expression

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April 25, 2024

WOMEN'S FEDERATION FOR WORLD PEACE USA  GLOBAL WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK FORUM

# ART TOUCHES HEART: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION



**ELYSSA LEININGER**  
Owner, Elyssa Leininger Western & Wildlife Art



**JENNIFER JEAN**  
Poet, Translator & Educator



**LYDIA MELTON**  
Dancer & Educator



**APR. 25, 2024**  
**8:00 PM EDT**



**MODERATOR: ADIA LANCASTER**  
Director, New Hope Foundation International

On April 25, 2024, WFWP USA hosted a GWPN Forum on the topic of “Art Touches Heart: Embracing the Power of Creative Expression,” emceed by Ms. Adia Lancaster, New Hope Foundation International Director, and GWPN Field Coordinator. The forum provided a chance for three speakers to share their shared experiences and perspectives on the transformative power of art in their lives. To set the stage for the sharing, Ms. Adia Lancaster shared Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon’s peace philosophy on art and highlighted three things:

### 1. The original purpose of artistic expression

The original purpose of artistic expression was to express love and gratitude for our Creator through beauty.

### 2. Art and culture is a life essential

Art and culture cannot be taken for granted as a luxury, as it carries great power.

### 3. The arts touch the heart

Artistic expression transforms the world as it touches emotion rather than reason, which is what really runs global decision-making.

Following this introduction, Ms. Adia introduced the speakers and called up Ms. Elyssa Leininger, Owner of Elyssa Leininger Western and Wildlife Art. With a passion for sharing beauty in underserved spaces, she sees her art as a beacon of hope. Quoting the renowned French writer Stendhal, she believes that "Beauty is the promise of happiness." During her presentation, Ms. Leininger showcased the profound transformation her art brings to spaces through before-and-after pictures. These visuals vividly demonstrated the impact of her work, turning once-dark environments into places filled with light and beauty. Ms. Leininger emphasized that not everyone has the privilege of having beautiful art in their homes or even accessible around them. By focusing on public art, she aims to bridge this gap, allowing the wider population to not only appreciate the aesthetic beauty of art but also to find hope in their everyday surroundings. Through her work, she seeks to uplift communities by infusing public spaces with the transformative power of art, enriching lives and inspiring positivity.

Highlighting her preference for using feel-good colors that evoke emotion and joy, Ms. Leininger shared examples of spaces she has worked on, including the 13th street underpass in Billings, Montana, the Hispanic Heritage Center building, and a recently completed mural in the YWCA Emergency Shelter for women and children escaping human trafficking and domestic violence, as part of an ongoing

collaboration with the Suicide Prevention Coalition. In addition, she regularly engages in garbage collection and landscaping efforts to ensure that the areas she enhances remain pristine and inviting for the community. She concluded by sharing that she believes art can not only transform your space but your entire outlook on life.

The next speaker was Ms. Jennifer Jean, poet, writer and educator who began her sharing by quoting Fyodor Dostoevsky: “Beauty will save the world.” Reflecting on her lifelong aspiration to be a poet, she recounted a pivotal moment during her college years when she encountered a Bridge of Peace event video hosted by the Women’s Federation for World Peace (WFWP). The Bridge of Peace seeks to reconcile conflicting communities by fostering forgiveness of the past and hope for the future. Ms. Jean described how watching this event planted a seed of reconciliation within her. In her collaborative work, she had the privilege of meeting the renowned Iraqi poet, Hanaa Ahmed. Together, they crafted a collection of poems exchanged between them, set to be published next year. Ms. Jean referred to this as a full-circle moment, where the seed planted by the WFWP video years ago had now blossomed into a fruitful collaboration. She concluded her sharing by reciting her poem, "High Noon," which encapsulated the essence of her journey and the hope for understanding and friendship:( an excerpt)

*"Let's meet here, Hanaa,  
on the original road of this mutual hometown  
with our translator, Wadaq. And once  
we all get used to the terrible  
discomfort of imperfect understanding,  
we'll know heaven, we'll  
know friendship is possible."*

The third speaker of the evening was Ms. Lydia Melton, a dancer and educator. Through her opening story, she offered a glimpse into the transcendent world of dance, through the lens of a dancer's journey towards performance. She emphasized the importance of embracing the present and allowing the beauty of expression to flow effortlessly. By sharing a dance video, Ms. Melton effectively illustrated how a dancer's authenticity and passion can resonate deeply with audiences, stirring emotions and transforming the space. As both a dedicated dancer and mentor, Ms. Melton acknowledged the challenges inherent in teaching the art of dance, yet found joy in witnessing her students' evolution from novices to fervent advocates for artistic expression. This she said underscored the profound impact of dance in nurturing creativity and fostering a deeper appreciation for the beauty of movement and sharing that with the world.

During the roundtable discussion, Ms. Adia posed a question to the speakers, seeking insights on how individuals feeling stifled can break free and express themselves authentically. In response, the following suggestions were offered:

1. Your art is your container and a neutral space and it doesn't have to be perfect.
2. Tap into what you feel. From that feeling comes an understanding that the world is so much larger and if you express your feelings to the world, your work will be received.
3. Do it for your heart and soul and for the love of the process.

The speakers concluded their discussion by imparting these profound words of wisdom regarding the transformative power of creative expression:

1. Cultivate community through art: They emphasized that art has the remarkable ability to foster a sense of community and belonging. Whether you're a seasoned artist or a novice exploring your creativity, it's essential to be intentional about joining artistic communities.
2. Acknowledge the impact of art: They emphasized that creative expression has the potential to change lives and even save them. Each artistic creation possesses a unique power to touch hearts, provoke thought, and inspire action. They encouraged artists to recognize the significance of their work and the ripple effect it can have on the world.
3. Embrace imperfection and individuality: In a world that often imposes standards of perfection, the speakers urged artists to embrace their uniqueness and authenticity. They reminded individuals that their creative work is inherently perfect because it reflects their personal journey, experiences, and perspective. They encouraged artists to trust in their creative instincts and to boldly share their creations with the world.

This forum was a poignant reminder of the transformative power of art and the profound impact that each individual's creative expression can have on the world.