

UPF Latin American Voices: Art Can Break Barriers and Build Peace

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South and Central America – Art and culture need no translation to communicate shared values, emotions and ideals across national borders. Speakers from Argentina, Costa Rica, Peru and the United States joined a webinar organized by UPF-Latin America and the Caribbean and the International Association of Art and Culture for Peace, on August 14, 2026, to share their views on the theme “From Barriers to Bridges; Art and Culture that Embrace Peace.”

Welcoming remarks were given by UPF’s regional president, **Mr. Eliécer Araya**, who stated that art and culture could be a universal language for reconciliation. “Art teaches us that difference is not a threat, but an asset,” he said. He added that beauty has transformative power, “the power to break down barriers and build bridges between hearts, peoples and nations.”

Ms. Mary Marín Alvarado, president of IAACP in Costa Rica, is a teacher and a UPF Ambassador for Peace. But most of all, she said, “I am a woman who deeply believes in the transformative power of education and art.”

She pointed out that humanity lives in a world full of borders and barriers, many of which cannot be seen. “Some are drawn on maps, and others, unfortunately, are constructed in our minds,” she said. “These are

the borders of prejudice, discrimination, intolerance, indifference, exclusion and fear of difference. Perhaps one of the greatest barriers of our time is that we have learned to see our differences before our shared humanity.”

Mr. Arturo Castro Guerra is an international concert pianist from Peru. He described Latin America as a victim of centralism, inequality and racism, the aftereffects of colonization. “These are our barriers: invisible yet ferocious walls that fragment our societies and isolate us from one another,” he said. He added, “Art in our region has never been an ornament or a luxury item; it has been a survival strategy, an archive of memory, and the strongest bridge for us to connect.”

He described how art overcomes barriers: “When an instrument of European origin and academic tradition, like the piano, intertwines with the vibration of an Andean charango, a horizontal conversation takes place. Neither is superior to the other; both listen to each other, adapt, and create a new soundscape that belongs to us all. This artistic dialogue shows us that the past and the present do not have to be in conflict. It teaches us that we can be global citizens, open to the aesthetic currents of the entire world, without losing a single millimeter of our local identity. This balance between what is ours and what is foreign, between the root and the crown of the tree, is the safe space where a peaceful coexistence flourishes, proud of its plurality.”

Mr. Jose Maria Martin is an ice sculptor in Argentina. Many communities in Argentina view glaciers as sacred and living things; his ice sculptures attempt to preserve this spirit. “The goal has always been to promote care for the land and respect for the memory of the indigenous peoples,” he said. He explained that ice sculptures also provide a wonderful opportunity to bring parents and children together for a shared experience of nature and culture. “The sun may melt the ice, but the shared experience between parents and children remains unchanged.”

Finally, the global coordinator of IAACP, **Mr. David Eaton** from the United States, explained the origin and concept of this organization. When Dr. Hak Ja Han inaugurated IAACP in November 2020, she mentioned in her address that music in the Western world has deep roots in the church, particularly in the Catholic tradition. “Western classical music emerged from the church as a product of religious tradition,” he said. “The liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church inspired great composers, artists, architects, dancers and poets to create works that expressed their faith in God and the conviction that, from a divinely centered perspective, it was possible to build a culture of peace.”

He quoted from Dr. Han’s memoir saying that, rather than politics, it is art and culture that truly transform the world. She wrote, “When people are moved by beauty – whether from art or nature – it opens the possibility of thinking in new ways.”