

Department of Art



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April 24, 2008

Arielle Wisotsky and Eric Messinger
Help Darfur Now
PO Box 5062
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920-5062

Dear Arielle Wisotsky, Eric Messinger and others at Help Darfur Now,

This spring, as part of an Art Education course on art and community at the University of Maine, students were asked to participate in a service-learning project focused on the genocide in Darfur. Art is a powerful vehicle for addressing and redressing a plethora of social issues, including, but not limited to, ones of inequality, poverty and the misuse of power. This project gave my students first-hand experience working with this in such a way as to benefit those living under the threat of genocide at the hands of the Janjaweed. This initiative took them out of the classroom and studio, and into their local community.

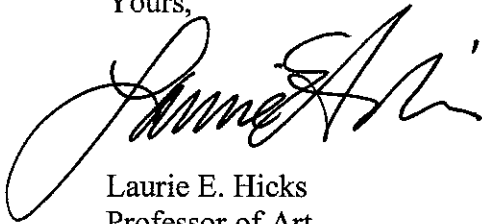
After reading a number of news articles and Don Cheadle and John Prendergast's book, *Not on Our Watch*, the students developed three related components as the basis for their service-learning project. These components reflected an awareness of the importance of educational, political and humanitarian approaches to using art as the basis for making a difference in their world. They divided into three groups, each responsible for one piece of the puzzle. One group developed a visual presentation that not only provided information about the situation in Darfur but also introduced the faces and experience of the people through photographs (collected from diverse news sources) and text. This presentation was projected on a large wall during the opening of an exhibition and at other times for students, faculty and staff to see. Those students interested in taking a more political stance followed your lead, designing and printing four different postcard images that were passed out during the presentation event. These cards provided participants and passersby an opportunity to communicate their views to US Senators, Olympia Snow and Susan Collins. The cards are being collected and will be mailed to their offices in the next couple weeks. Though believing in the power of art education and the importance of political action through art, the remaining students in my class, saw a need to use art in a more direct humanitarian action. Toward that end, they organized and implemented an art auction that coincided with the opening of the annual student exhibition. They collected artwork from faculty and students, as well as local art teachers and artists, raising \$1169.00. These funds, in the form of checks made out to Help Darfur Now, are enclosed.

This was an extremely successful project that touched many of my students deeply and helped all of them begin to understand the power of art to make a difference in the world outside their own lived experiences. I have no doubt that these students will take this experience with them into their future art classrooms, encouraging their students to engage in similar projects to the benefit of others.

In case you keep such information, I have enclosed an article on this project that was published in the local newspaper and picked up in several of my students' hometown papers.

Thank you for serving as role models for my students and for all your organization does to help the people of Darfur.

Yours,



Laurie E. Hicks
Professor of Art

Students responsible for the success of this project:

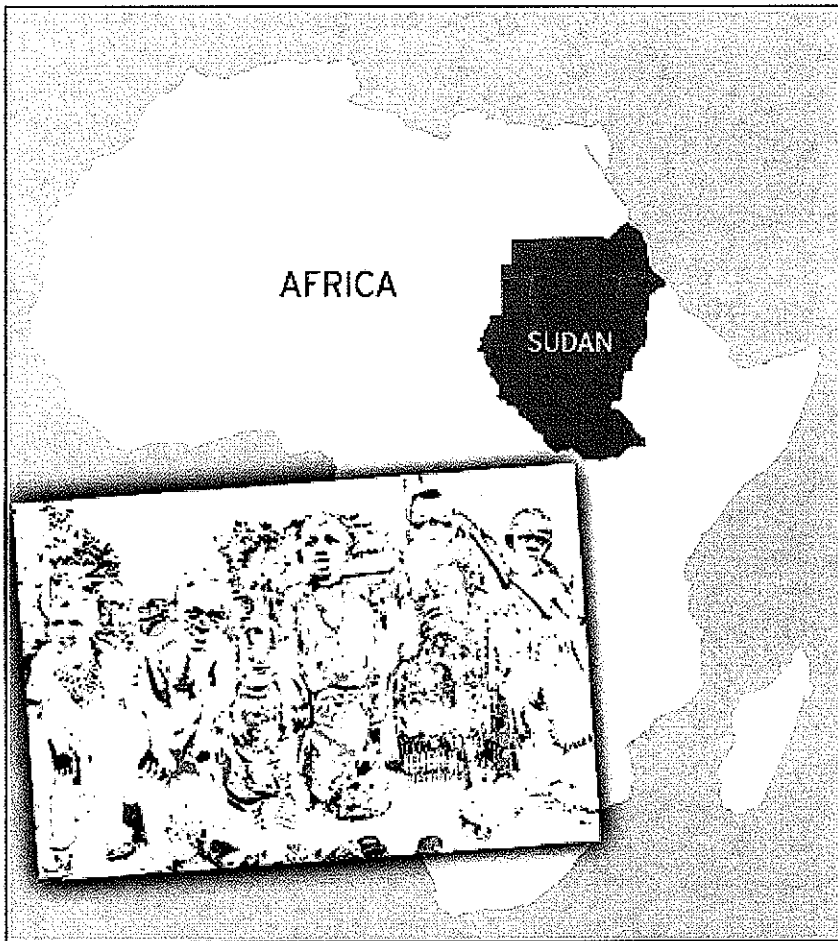
Elizabeth Agrell	Samantha Orchard
Ashley Alexander	Kiley Stevens
Iva Allen	Lindsay Strout
Dana Andrews	Brianna Tibbetts
Shannon Campbell	Lyndsay Woods
Hope Duncanson	Morgan Wren
Stephanie Hare	

UM art education students extend community boundaries

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Some of the students in University of Maine professor Laurie Hicks' Topics in Art Education class were aware of the ongoing violence in the Darfur region of Sudan. Others had heard of the genocide in the African country, but didn't know many specifics.

Thanks to a service learning project designed by Hicks, the students have had an education in recent African history. Just as important, however, is the lesson they've learned through setting up the project itself — an experience Hicks hopes her students will take into their own classrooms some day.

The three-part project will coincide with the opening Friday evening of the 2008 Juried Student Art Exhibition "Art Matters" in the university's Department of Art. The exhibit,

which is now on display to the public, will have its official opening from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, April 11 at Lord Hall on the University of Maine campus.

The student exhibition, which is now open for viewing, features more than 100 works of art in a range of media.

The art education students will show their three projects Friday with a series of postcards, a PowerPoint display and a silent auction that will feature the works of several faculty members, including Orono artist Michael Lewis, to benefit the charity organization Help Darfur Now.

"[The goal is to] to teach them to use their professional knowledge as artists and creators to affect the world in some way, no matter how small," Hicks said. "... As educators, they have a responsibility to introduce experiences that aren't in a textbook."

It's a lesson that has made an impact on Shannon Campbell, a senior from Eddington.

"You can do things outside of the classroom but when you start to get the community involved

in this type of project, you're really doing something above and beyond the regular classroom lesson," she said. "We're not just learning about Darfur per se, but actually how to carry out a service learning project as we would if we were the teachers."

UM art education students do service learning projects every year, but in the past the projects have been very local. Students have spent time at the Shaw House in Bangor, for example, or with residents of assisted living facilities.

This year, however, Hicks said she wanted to impress upon the college students that their community extends beyond local, regional and national boundaries.

Students read the book "Not on Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond." One of the authors of that book, actor Don Cheadle, starred in the movie "Hotel Rwanda," which the art education students watched.

From there, the students formed three groups to put together around Friday's opening.

One group focused on the politics of art. That group, of which Campbell is a member, designed a series of four postcards on which students and other members of the UM community can write their feelings about Darfur. The postcards will then be packaged and sent to U.S. Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe.

Another group worked on the educational aspect of art. Those students designed a power point presentation with images of and statistics about Darfur, which will be projected on a wall of Lord Hall's first floor during the opening.

The third group organized the auction, which will take place on the second floor of Lord Hall during the exhibition's opening. Maine junior Dana Andrews said there should be at least 20 pieces up for auction. Lewis, a professor at the university who is also a well-known local artist, is contributing, as are Hicks, and faculty members Owen Smith and Nina Jerome Sutcliffe.

Andrews helped organize the auction, which has been a lesson itself in organization.

"Everyone asks me, why do I want to be an art teacher?" said Andrews, who is from York Harbor. "I want to be able to help other students change culture, change the world, just make a difference. I hadn't had any real-world experience with it, but I guess I do now. We're doing something to make a difference. There's a lot you can do just locally, helping out people in need."

Lord Hall is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays. Exhibits are free. The postcards will be available Friday during the auction and Monday from noon to 2 p.m. in front of the university's Fogler Library. For more information about the auction, contact Hicks at 581-3247.

<http://bangornews.com>