

WCA International Caucus Online Publication, March 2014

"Impressions: Artists Consider the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)" presented to packed room at UN Commission on the Status of Women Conference 2014



Allison Milewski, Maureen Burns-Bowie, Dr. Mary Oestereicher Hamill, Anne Kantor Kellett

These women brought professionalism, responsibility, accountability, earnestness and dedication to this project. This is what it takes to pull off an stunning and impactful event. This demonstrates why WCA is an NGO of the UN and how, when we up our game, when we set standards for excellence as artists and activists, the results continue to echo in meaningful ways in our communities and the larger world. — Sherri Cornett

By Patti Jordan

The Commission on the Status of Women is a global network dedicated to gender equality and empowerment of women. Each year they hold a conference at UN Headquarters in NY to review progress in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Representatives of UN Member States, Civil Society, and UN NGO's gather, discuss, and make recommendations.

In 2013 Sherri Cornett, the Director of International Caucus and Maureen Burns-Bowie presented the Philadelphia Chapter Ragdoll Project at the Artisan Fair at CSW.

This year, 2014, Maureen Burns-Bowie, Director of the UN Program of WCA International Caucus, Representative to the UN, and WCA New York Chapter member organized a Parallel Event Presentation held at the UN on March 11th, titled, "*Impressions: Artists Consider the Millenium Development Goals*" (MDGs). This outstanding and proactive event featured Anne Kantor Kellett, Mary Hamill (WCA New York Chapter members) and Allison Milewski, (WCA and IC member) three women artists whose work addresses concerns addressed in the *Millennium Development Goals* drafted by the UN. Some of these relevant MDGs include: : eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality, improved health, environmental sustainability.

Visible expressions of these pressing objectives, often photography-based, were evidenced in the works of all three women. Artist Anne Kantor Kellett spoke of "Surviving Surviving." She is the child of Holocaust survivors and she expressed her sensitivity to other victims of genocide. Kantor Kellett described the burden of survivors as an experience imprinted in memory, present in her evocative painting and sculpture and in her tender photographs of Rwandan refugees. She elucidated that the women survivors of the Rwanda Genocide possess the same look of grief in the their eyes as women Holocaust survivors of Nazism, and that in Rwanda many sites are memorials.

Documentary artist and educational reformer Mary Oestereicher Hamill demonstrated how artists can enliven awareness, and that she often chooses to engage her audience rather than lecture - and that she did. Particularly poignant was her *Cambodia War Widows Project*, a joint project with Khmer Rouge survivor Chath pierSath. This

multimedia project records and reinvents the recalled atrocities from the Khmer Rouge killings as well as the hardships in present-day Cambodia. In her documentation we viewed the widows in this marginalized community creating strikingly iconic, fabric-based cyanotypes honoring their dead husbands, thereby documenting and reclaiming lost histories.

Allison Milewski presented *PhotoForward*, a sustainable photography and media-based program she established to empower women multi-generationally. She described how her program encourages girls and women to become storytellers for their own communities, both domestically in cooperation with social workers and youth development programs for girls in foster care, and globally through programs aimed at girls and women from marginalized ethnic groups, such as Laos and Cambodia. Several young women from the *PhotoForward* and Sanctuary Arts Program were present to share personal stories and photographic visions, culminating in a powerful poetry reading by Meri Northern Lights Marabyan.

The evening concluded with stimulating conversation and in-depth insight through an enlivened question-and-answer. A very emotive moment came when women in the audience read aloud quotes from the Cambodian women artists' *PhotoForward* project. Delivering on the promise of the *Millenium Development Goals* and attesting to the inherent success of the event, points were then made as to the urgency to take decisive action and the power of art to express important goals. In keeping with the program's title, it was truly a Parallel Event in that as these women artists were mutually reinforcing goals, we gained a glimpse of the world through their lens. And we saw that they're changing the world - one work of art at a time.

About Us

The International Caucus maintains the Women's Caucus for Art's involvement with the United Nations, develops art platforms to support UN Goals, develops collaborative projects with other global organizations, collects data about art & activism projects and shares this information with the larger WCA membership.