

A Sense of Place Makes a lot of Sense

By Julie Ryan, Editor

The 2011 Fall Conference was a wonderful success! Held in Kearney on the UNK campus, with events at various locations throughout town, the conference centered on the idea of place-based education. Dr. Martin Rosenberg, Professor of Art History at Rutgers University, was the keynote speaker.

The Board held their fall meeting on the Thursday night before the conference as usual. To accommodate the members that teach in the Omaha Public Schools who were unable to be present due to their Curriculum Day the meeting was conducted via Skype. While there are a few glitches to work out, the process proved to be beneficial. The minutes of the meeting may be found on the NATA website under the "News and Events" tab, select "State."

The official conference opening was Friday morning. The General Assembly followed visits to the Registration Table and the Vendor Displays. The bulk of Friday's presentations were geared for pre-service teachers and they were on hand to soak it all in. Students from across the state learned much from some of the best and brightest teachers in our organization. Thanks to Christy Kosmicki, Jan Jones, Lance Wurst, Lorinda Rice, Donna Alden, Gail Dickel, Shari Hofschire, Joanne Sowell, and Debbie Kippley for sharing with tomorrow's teachers!

Friday afternoon the conference moved to the Museum of Nebraska Art to see their current exhibitions, hear gallery talks and share in a reception sponsored by Blick. Dinner was on your own but many people spent the evening together continuing the conversations that had started earlier in the day.

I am one of those who was not able to be present until Saturday. I was worried that I would miss out on a lot, and I still feel I did, but I also believe that I learned a lot during the one day I was able to participate. I got to hear about and see what Gary Day has been creating these last few years. That was a wonderful 75 minutes! His students are so lucky to have him as their professor, just like I was back in the mid 80s.

The afternoon keynote address by Dr. Martin Rosenberg was awesome! Through his experience and understanding of place based education Dr. Rosenberg took us on a fantastical journey from one side of the world to another and from antiquated to contemporary times. He fleshed out as many of the notable places in Nebraska as he could; creating an arsenal of knowledge that every teacher in our state should have. Dr. Rosenberg is to be commended for his dedication to art education and thanked for giving this former student a wonderful new memory.

The afternoon sessions on the second day of the conference always seem to have fewer people in attendance; it's much like the last day presentations at Nationals where the majority of the people have left. But, the hearty were treated to some wonderful stuff. I really wanted to see Liz Langdon (a dear long-time friend) or Bill Cavill (my new quick-witted friend) present but I had my own information to share. And Bill, thanks for letting Liz and me hang out with you in your closet, I mean office.

The Art Educator's Exhibition Awards were presented in the Walker Gallery. It was a lovely show and participants were asked to share their inspiration or some other tidbit about the artwork. It was fun to listen to them share. The quality of the artworks was very high and reflected well upon the artists and the organization. Christy Kosmicki's winning piece, *Rising from the Ashes*, a mixed-media piece on Styrofoam, looked heavy but turned out to be quite light. It was great to see her standing next to her artwork running her hands over it as she spoke. It was easy to envision her at work on the piece.

The conference concluded on Saturday night with the Awards Banquet and Silent Auction. Each year I am reminded of all the great experiences our student's are having as I listen to the winners and wish they were my teacher. Congratulations to all of you!

Joe Gregory was selected as the Art Educator of the Year. If you don't know Joe, you should. If you heard Joe's nomination letters you know that he toils tirelessly for his students. If you heard Joe's acceptance speech, than you know that his students love and need him as much as he loves and needs them.

Joe is a master at his craft, working with severely and profoundly disabled students. His kindness and compassion, combined with his insightful wisdom and years of experience put him in a class all by himself, but you would never know it by talking with him and he would never say it. He is much to humble to ever declare a victory for himself; he works so that his students find success. His biography is located elsewhere in the newsletter but I could finish without saying Congratulations Joe! You truly deserve this honor! It is a long-overdue recognition!

Thanks to the Fall Conference committee led by Donna Alden and Sr. Margaret for putting together a wonderful experience! It was definitely time well spent!

Next year's conference is a joint weekend with the Iowa Art Educators. It will be held at venues in Omaha and Council Bluffs on Oct. 5th – 7th. The conference theme is Public Art as Advocacy. The Nebraska team is being led by Debbie Kippley and the presentation proposals are due to her by March 1st. A proposal form is found in this newsletter and on the website. Plan to attend and submit a proposal; you won't be sorry!