



# Connection

a site-specific ceramic mural for the Exhibitions Program  
at Philadelphia International Airport

a city-wide collaboration among Philadelphia youth,  
pediatric hospital patients and artist Dit Wah Deng

March 2002 - March 2003

a project of COSACOSA art at large, Inc.

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*Connection* was supported by the Exhibitions Program at Philadelphia International Airport.

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# Art Makes the Connection

by Kimberly Niemela

To understand the role of art in a society is to understand the society itself. The ancient Greeks believed the Muses -- the arts -- were born of Mnemosyne, literally *Memory*. Art caused humankind to *remember* its connection to the eternal and each individual to acknowledge his or her relationship to a larger community. By contrast, in our culture, we tend to view art as a commodity or as an entertainment, something to be possessed or consumed.

The rise of humanistic psychology in the mid-twentieth century further marginalized our perception of art and art-making. The work of Abraham Maslow and other theorists placed the creative experience in the exclusive domain of a “self-actualized” elite. According to Maslow, the rest of us -- preoccupied as we are with finding food, shelter, safety, love and recognition -- never are free to seek or receive aesthetic enlightenment. Still other intellectuals continue to exacerbate our cultural divisions with futile attempts to define creative worth or “high art.” Such models run counter to art’s original, inclusive nature -- as a gathering, healing and empowering force for and within a shared community.

By recapturing this essential role for art in our society, we can rediscover, reaffirm and redefine our community and cultural identities. We can recognize our connectedness and the strength in our diversity. We can restore and revitalize our neighborhoods. We can enable every citizen to bring forth a creative voice that realizes and renews art’s ancient passage of positive change and growth. We can recover our Muse.

COSACOSA works with Philadelphia residents to create collaborative and interactive public art. During the past year, our *Connection* project explored themes common to all of our human experience, transcending the bounds of culture and community. *Connection* is site-specific to the connecting

walkway between Philadelphia International Airport Terminals C and D. The 80' by 5' ceramic mural joins the two terminals both physically and metaphorically. The lower, outside corners of the piece contain outstretched human hands, avian in form, objects of flight. Issuing from the hands against a deep blue sky is a macrocosmic arc joining the full expanse of the exhibition space -- filled with small, detailed sculptures by young COSACOSA artists.

COSACOSA brought together young people city-wide -- pediatric hospital patients with neighborhood youth -- to describe needs, ideas, hopes and desires that they believed

were shared by people all over the world. Our young participants then created the over 1,200 miniature *Connection* sculptures based on their discussions.

The children were remarkably intuitive in defining how we are all connected. Their artwork provides a visual laundry list of needs virtually sourced from one of Maslow’s charts -- family, friends, love, honor, refuge, food, clothing, and compensation all find representation. Sports, television, and cell phones recall our modern obsessions. Images of the environment, intercultural unity, and world peace attest to the major concerns

of our youth. *Connection* participants also created hundreds of ceramic stars -- colorfully painted on the outside, with secret wishes for themselves and for their world written on the side affixed to the finished installation.

At the airport, *Connection* reminds the travelling public of the ties that bind us, no matter who we are, whence we come, or where we go. For the project’s young artists, the fullness of human experience now is bound inextricably to the rise and acknowledgment of their own shared community. Art makes the connection.

Interdisciplinary artist Kimberly Niemela is Founder and Director of COSACOSA art at large, Inc.

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Miniature *Connection* sculptures by young COSACOSA artists.

# Connection Artists

## Dit Wah Deng, Lead Artist

Fate, the arbiter of unexpected connections, inspires the work of interdisciplinary artist Dit Wah Deng. From grand scale, site-specific installations to detailed, mixed-media miniatures, Deng's work explores intercultural commonalities and the often unseen congruities that exist among art, nature, and human nature.

Born in mainland China, Deng fled with his family to the then-Portuguese colony of Macao during the Cultural Revolution. Trained in Hong Kong, Deng completed apprenticeships in sculpture, fiber art and architectural engineering before arriving in Philadelphia. This unusual and broad experience of multiple cultures, environments, and disciplines informs Deng's art. Destiny, he reminds the viewer, is always at work, an inscrutable and harmonious force; change is constant. Incessant adaptability -- the will to shape a peaceable co-existence among different people and places --

becomes the preeminent responsibility of the artist, as well as of the community he serves.

Most of Deng's work is collaborative and community-based. Over the last decade, he has developed numerous projects in Philadelphia neighborhoods investigating traditional cultural expressions and healing practices. Deng previously led *International Appropriations/Cultural Assimilations*, a year-long project creating a visual nexus of common cultural artifacts between Chinatown and the Italian Market along Ninth Street. His recent public works also include a gigantic operational sun clock created with patients at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, the symbol of COSACOSA's *Healing Art Project*.

Multidisciplinary works by Dit Wah Deng (below, from left):  
 The Eternal Smile, ceramic, 10"x14", 2002.  
 Flying Leonardo (detail), mixed media on wood, 6'x4', 1995.  
 Sun Clock, steel, wood, acrylic resin, oils, 9'x9', 1998.



**Betsy Leschinsky, Associate Artist**, is a ceramist and fiber artist expert in adapting art-making techniques for individuals with special needs. She has been artist in residence at organizations nationwide including Design Tech and the San Francisco Fabrics Workshop. She also has taught in variety of locales, from hospitals to homeless shelters, and at numerous schools, including locally at The Shipley School.

**Andres Chamorro, Associate Artist**, is a ceramist and sculptor with vast experience in creating interdisciplinary workshops for children. Using ceramics, painting, and crafts, he designs and delivers theatrical puppet shows and public art projects to raise awareness and modify behaviors on a wide range of topics, including health issues (e.g., AIDS, asthma, cancer, lead poisoning, smoking) and environmental concerns.

Images of *Connection* artists at work surround the completed piece.



# Connection

a project of COSACOSA art at large, Inc.



a city-wide collaboration among Philadelphia youth,  
pediatric hospital patients and artist Dit Wah Deng  
clay, wood, and acrylic resin; 80' x 5'; 2002-2003.  
Philadelphia International Airport, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



# Connected Community

## Community Participants

Isa Abdul-Hakim  
Gresna Abdullah  
Antonio Adams  
Gabriel Aiken  
Lynn Alexander  
Alexander Alford  
Latifa Allen  
Odalisca Aponte  
Hollie Archer  
Robin Austin  
Shaniquica Austin  
Benjamin Barresi  
Derrick Barnes  
Derion Barnes  
Robert Barnes  
Linda Barney  
Ladia Barr  
Latrice Barr  
Kira Bedmar  
Adam Beers  
Jerome Belian  
Tatiana Bell  
Alyson Benzenhafer  
Kim Bethea  
Megan Beverly

Kristan Billups  
Tony Blakely  
Joel Blanco  
Crystal Blessing  
Rob Blessing  
Tyler Blessing  
Ivory Bostick  
Troy Boulware  
Danielle Bradley  
James Branch  
Dewanda Brandon  
Queen E. Bristow  
Lacey Brooks  
Lexus Brown  
Taylor Brownfield  
Djuan Bryant  
Magina Bryant  
Kyle Bullock  
Jessica Burg  
Steven Burgio  
Kimberly Burgos  
Joey Capelli  
Raneisha Carter  
Veronica Castaneda  
Collen Cerebe

Danny Clark  
Patricia Clark  
Mara Claudie  
Ciara Coleman  
Shekeena Collier  
Crain Collins  
Gianni Collins  
Karen Collins  
Renard Collins  
Eduardo Coste  
Chastity Cotto  
Sirron Ellison  
Lisa Cuevas  
Donald Cundy  
Elise Cundy  
Ronnie Darden  
Brittany Davis  
Euphoria Davis  
Janell Davis  
Lucretia Davis  
Marilynn Davis  
Phillip Davis  
Sheila Davis  
Ghum Deng  
Chris DePowell  
Josh DePowell

Carmen Diaz  
Ivannys Diaz  
Katia Ditzer  
Lynn Dodds  
Roslyn Don  
Carly Dorfman  
Celeste Duarte  
Laquisha Dunston  
Chandler Durham  
Zachary Durham  
Casey Elliott  
Elizabeth Cruz  
Lisa Cuevas  
Donald Cundy  
Elise Cundy  
Ronnie Darden  
Brittany Davis  
Euphoria Davis  
Janell Davis  
Lucretia Davis  
Marilynn Davis  
Phillip Davis  
Sheila Davis  
Ghum Deng  
Chris DePowell  
Josh DePowell

Debbie Freed  
Janelle Freed  
Jessica Gaines  
Kathleen Gallagher  
Patrick Gallagher  
Tony Garrett  
Juan George  
Greg Giangiorodano  
Shawnette Gibbs  
Lauren Giles  
Chris Giorno  
Taylor Giorno  
Anna Godek  
Enid Gonzales  
Daniel Gonzalez  
Frances Gonzalez  
Noel González  
Tyesha Goodman  
Shealita Green  
Guadira Gregg  
Jerome Griffin  
Michael Guy  
Lawrence Hallback  
Gloria Harpet  
Chanise Harps  
Michelle Harps

Khayree Harrison  
Adrienne Hawthorne  
Ariel E. Hayes  
Wayne Henderson  
Shawn Herbert  
Kim Higgins  
Maria Hinzon  
Khadijah Hogg  
Tamara Holland  
James Holsten  
Laura Holsten  
Haneefah Hopkins-Bey  
Tahira Hopkins-Bey  
Paul Horsey  
Wayne Horton  
Andrea Hutchinson  
Debra Irons  
Jamall Ishmell  
Zachary Jackson  
Sabrina James  
Neqeon Jewell  
Keiyana Johnson  
LaLannie Johnson  
David Johnson  
Jillian Johnson

Rasheed Johnson  
Terence Johnson  
Jamar Jones  
Jeanette Jones  
Joyce Jones  
Terri Jones  
Vonique Jones  
Geoff Kennedy  
Lauren Kim  
Ryan Kim  
Jeanine Kinsey  
Satara Kinsey  
Christina Kittrell  
Julia Kramer-Golinkoff  
Kim Layton  
Tiffany Laibhen  
Danielle Lamar  
Euphoria Layton  
Sam Leinhauser  
Jessica Lewin  
Emily Leyland  
Victor Liara  
Hua Lim  
Keng Lim  
Meihang Lim  
Meilin Lim

Anna Mercado  
Agustin Miches  
Kayla Micucci  
DaJuan Miller  
Marcia Miller  
Ramon Miranda  
Waldeen Mitchell  
Jordan A. Montero  
James Montgomery  
Abigail Morales  
Sonia Morales  
Zenovia Moultria-Kay  
Jessica Moye-Oakman  
Clara Muhammad  
Naandi Murgerson  
Natasha Myula  
Erica Nanez  
Janny Navarreto, Jr.  
Chandaravuth Ngeth  
Priscilla Ricci  
Naomi Richardson  
Juliana Rios-Rios  
Tanasha Nunez  
Daniel O'Neal  
Mike O'Neill  
Mary O'Neill  
Marta Ortiz

Melanie Ortiz  
Quizq Palmer  
Ikea Parker  
Kwammaine Parson  
Roshan Patel  
Shardanae Patrick  
Jenisha Perez  
Davondra Pern  
Kellen Peterson  
Gabriel Plummer  
Kiara Rain  
Ivory Ravenell  
Nadirah Rawls  
Christine Readinger  
Mary Readinger  
Brittany Reid  
Priscilla Ricci  
Naomi Richardson  
Juliana Rios-Rios  
Tanasha Nunez  
Daniel O'Neal  
Mike O'Neill  
Mary O'Neill  
Marta Ortiz

Denisha Robinson  
Niema Robinson  
Jenny Rodriguez  
Juan Rodriguez  
Marilyn Rodriguez  
Militta Rodriguez  
Ricardo Rodriguez  
Saul Rodriguez  
Vanessa Rodriguez  
Vitalición Rodriguez  
Brittiany Rodgers  
Corrine A. Rose  
Michael Ruiz  
Lucy Russo  
David Ryan, Jr.  
Zakiyyah Ryan  
Margaret Saccomanno  
Michael Samuels  
Lilibell Sánchez  
Susan Sánchez  
Latisha Santiago  
Carmen Serrano  
Juana Serrano  
Kneshia Sheard  
Karen Silber  
Cameron Sims

Rana Sindhikara  
Shanté Skinner  
Brooke Smith  
Morgan Smith  
Robert Smith  
Thomas Smith  
Tiffany Smith  
Tyrone Smith  
Eric Slaweski  
Zahira E. Soto  
Martin Spellman  
Matthew Spellman  
Tyre Spencer  
Davonte Stevenson  
Dina Stonberg  
Zelria Stoner  
Isaiah Strothers  
Sharolyn Summers  
Marcelene Sutter  
Molly Sutter  
Nancy Sutter  
Amy Taglieri  
Joanne Taglieri  
Paul Taglieri  
William Talley

Grace Tang  
Alexandria Taraborrelli  
Franklin Tate  
Clifton Taylor  
Shanita Taylor  
Destiny Terry  
Ty Terry  
Makenda Thomas  
Dorothy Thomashefsky  
Betty Thompson  
Erica Thompson  
Felicia Thompson  
Tyre Spencer  
Davonte Stevenson  
Dina Stonberg  
Zelria Stoner  
Isaiah Strothers  
Sharolyn Summers  
Marcelene Sutter  
Molly Sutter  
Nancy Sutter  
Amy Taglieri  
Joanne Taglieri  
Paul Taglieri  
William Talley

Luis Velez  
Rimeake Wackens  
Raquilla Walker  
Mardia Walton  
Grace Warkulwiz  
Miroku Washington  
Genise Watson  
Jason Webster  
Dominique White  
Shaniece White  
Eudora Wiggins  
Myles Wiggins  
Sarah Wiggins  
Karen Wiggins-Skinner  
Angelina Williams  
Christopher Williams  
Kevin Williams  
Christopher Windle  
Nina Windle  
Therèse Windle  
Tessa Windle  
Coryn Wolk  
Liana Wolk  
Alexis Young  
Raymond Zayas  
Margot Zeller

## Organizational Participants

Art for Change  
Artventure  
Camp Victory  
Challenge Learning Camp  
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
City of Philadelphia Health District #6  
Congreso de Latinos Unidos  
Family Planning Council  
Ferguson Manor Community Center  
Germantown Boys and Girls Club  
Hartranft Elementary School  
Kenderton School  
Nicetown Boys and Girls Club  
Nicetown-Tioga Branch of  
the Free Library of Philadelphia  
Norris Empowerment Group Higher Ground  
Norris Square Children's Center  
North City Youth Association  
St. Christopher's Hospital for Children  
Shriners Hospitals for Children  
The Sikora Center  
Teen Futures Coalition  
Temple Health Connection  
Temple University Children's Medical Center  
Zion Learning Center and Day Camp



# Connected Youth

Young People's Essays on how we all can make a "Connection"

We asked our project participants to describe ideas, needs and desires that can "connect" different kinds of people -- from family members, friends and kids in their neighborhoods to kids on the other side of the city -- or even on the other side of the world! Here are some of their responses:

## Connecting People by Genise Watson, Grade 4

### Introduction

Connecting people is a part of life. Many things connect people and bring them together. Jobs, music, and family traditions bring people together all around the world.

### Different Jobs

People around the world have all different kinds of jobs. Jobs generate a world economy and keep things busy. People pay taxes, too, to help their country raise lots of money. This money can be used to pay for low income housing, education, and medical care for others. Jobs bring people together from all parts of the world.

### Got the Music!

Everyone loves music, and people love different kinds of music. They might like to dance together to different types of music. Some people create their own music. Music allows people to relax and have fun.

### Family Love

Families feed you, love you, and take care of you. They teach you the things you need to know, like responsibility. Families teach you what you need to do when you are grown up. Families and family love are special connections shared by people all around the world.



Lee Fogel (at center) worked as a Community Coordinator for *Connection*. She currently serves on COSACOSA's Youth Council and Advisory Board.

## We Feel, We Heal by Adam Martínez Abad, Grade 8

Connections are feelings shared among people. We can be bound together by all different types of emotions -- sadness, happiness, anger, or fear.

Whenever, wherever there is a tragic event, people of different backgrounds, religions, or races all share a common sadness and empathize with those who are suffering. People who are, at first take, very different from each other, all feel the need to help to make things right and are suddenly willing to work side by side.

Happy events, such as holiday celebrations or a city's home team winning also bring people together. Individuals with different backgrounds and political views will come together as one to celebrate, sometimes even hugging total strangers that happen to be standing nearby!

Anger is unique in that it can be used to unite us for a bad cause or for a good one. Anger makes us act out instead of working it out. When we're angry we see only our differences. We're really afraid of the unknown, and our fear disconnects us from each other. Fear can possess us and bind us, but it can't move us forward.

But anger, without rage or fear, *can* also move us forward. We can be aroused with anger at injustices in the world and be called to action to try to make the world a fairer place.

Our emotions hold an amazing amount of power. We need to use that power for good. Let's connect our positive feelings and thoughts together to make the world a better place for us to live. Peace in our city. Peace on earth.

## Creating A Connection by Lee Fogel, Grade 12

This past summer I helped run workshops for COSACOSA's *Connection* project. Day after day I asked the children participating, "What connects you to different types of people?" They expressed their responses using clay. They made hands and hearts and food and tears. They made snowmen and houses and musical notes. They made the most intricate flowers and the most indescribable globs of clay.

I was not always able to see, at first, how a given piece related to the theme, *Connection*, but I figured it was not my place to determine the legitimacy of anyone else's work. I watched as children molded heads and hair and clothing and trees, and I realized eventually how each object might symbolize a human connection. Before my very eyes, sky, cats, pizza, flags, and birds were given new meaning. I began to see that there are infinite ways to connect different

human beings. What's more, as I opened my mind up to the possible meanings of each piece, I developed a connection with each young artist.

So what is it that connects me to all different people? Now that I'm trying to answer this question for myself, I keep coming back to those art-making workshops. I realize that despite everyone's different approach to the project, the experience itself created the "connection" for me. By engaging in the act of creating, each participant (myself included) acted upon the deeply human urge to create.

Humans create buildings and bridges, music, computers, and art. We create ideas. We create cultures and civilizations. With hands and hearts, we create food and tears and snowmen and musical notes. We mold precise replicas of what we envision, as well as indistinguishable globs of clay. We create, and we are connected.

"Each of us inevitable, Each of us limitless...  
Each of us here as divinely as any is here...pass'd in compassion...around the whole earth,  
I have look'd for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands,  
I think some divine rapport has [connected] me with them.

-Walt Whitman, *Salut Au Monde!*

# COSACOSA art at large

Art creates cultural change.

Founded in 1990, COSACOSA art at large, Inc. creates new art specific to Philadelphia neighborhoods and public spaces. Through collaborative art workshops, neighborhood-based artist residencies, and media projects, we enable dialogues among our city's disparate cultures and communities. COSACOSA projects assure a sense of equality among people of diverse backgrounds and differing abilities, while building their participation in their local communities as well as in society-at-large.

**interaction** COSACOSA art workshops engage people of differing backgrounds to create a common project. Each workshop identifies a community theme to explore through one of many possible artistic disciplines, from painting to theater, from quilt-making to ceramics. COSACOSA has brought together thousands of citizens from over thirty Philadelphia neighborhoods to learn about art, about each other, and about how to work together. As our participants grow in understanding and cooperative skills, their community -- our city -- grows with them.

**interpretation** COSACOSA artist commissions and media projects expand upon ideas evolved in our public workshops. Again, our approach is multi-disciplinary -- from tile mosaics for a school to interactive sculpture for a hospital, from audio work examining changing city neighborhoods to theatrical journeys through Philadelphia's public monuments filmed for the Smithsonian Institution. COSACOSA interpretive projects provoke accessible, insightful dialogues, while building collaborative forums in which to address the common and uncommon challenges of living together.

COSACOSA continues to design and apply new models to deliver innovative and interactive "dialogues through art" directly into Philadelphia neighborhoods. For more information about COSACOSA, and to learn how to participate in our programs, please visit our website at [www.cosacosa.org](http://www.cosacosa.org).

## Exhibitions Program at Philadelphia International Airport

In July 1998, Philadelphia International Airport established an Exhibitions Program. The purpose of this visual arts initiative is to humanize the airport environment, provide visibility for Philadelphia's unique cultural life, and to enhance and enrich the experience of the traveling public at Philadelphia International Airport.

The Exhibitions Program is responsible for organizing and presenting rotating exhibitions that are located throughout the airport facility. The exhibitions change throughout the year to provide a variety of educational and cultural programs to the visiting public. There are only a few airports in the world that showcase temporary exhibitions. This forum for presenting visual art is progressive and attests to the airport's commitment in supporting arts and culture.

The Exhibitions Program at Philadelphia International Airport provides millions of visitors from a global community access to a wide variety of art forms including fine arts, crafts, design, and photography by artists from Philadelphia and around the world. For more information about the Exhibitions Program at Philadelphia International Airport, please visit our website at [www.phl.org](http://www.phl.org).

## Connection Staff

- Kimberly Niemela Director
- Dit Wah Deng Lead Artist
- Betsy Leschinsky Associate Artists
- Andres Chamorro
- James Branch Community Coordinators
- Lee Fogel
- Roslyn Don Volunteer Coordinators
- Lucy Russo
- Betty Thompson
- Ciara Coleman Workshop Assistants
- Daniel Gonzalez
- Gabriel Plummer
- Shaniece White
- Joelle Garnick Child Life Liaisons
- Ann Lear
- Jennifer Lemisch
- Candy Nyce
- Siomara Lopez Public Relations Liaisons
- Jennifer McGowen
- Katie Murphy
- Smart Cookie Design Publication Design Development



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