

# Connecting to Artists with Skype

Frank Juarez

This past summer, I attended an educator residency at the Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri. About midweek, the instructor and participating art teachers talked about how we connect with the art world outside of our classroom. We went around the room and shared how we connect with artists, museums, arts centers, and so on. When my turn came, I knew exactly what I wanted to share.

## The Midwest Artist Studios Project

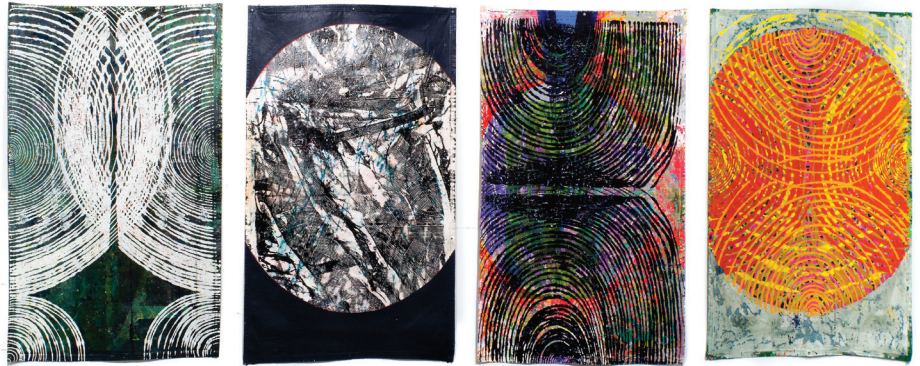
Since 2014, I've been Skyping artists into my classroom who I've worked with through a project I call the Midwest Artist Studios Project. One of the project's goals is to provide a way for art teachers and students to interact with these artists via Skype. Through this platform, artists and students have the opportunity to talk about the work they've created or are in the process of creating. This exchange results in critiques, Q and A sessions about each other's work, or just the opportunity to talk "art shop."

I observed that my students are comfortable and confident speaking with an artist who they don't know. It's a magical experience to be a part of and watch unfold!

## Enlisting Artists

How does one create a series such as this? It all begins with approaching artists who you know. I'm fortunate to know a lot of artists from across the U.S. and beyond through multiple projects I oversee and a gallery that I manage in Milwaukee. Not everyone has this type of resource readily available, but there are ways to tap into the art world, such as seeking artists who are living in your community, visiting local arts organizations, visiting artist's websites, attending receptions, or connecting with them on social media.

We teach our students that art has value both intrinsically and extrinsically. We know that sometimes art-



A tarp installation from contemporary artist Jason Rohlf. Image courtesy of Frank Juarez.

ists are taken advantage of, and we try to prevent this from happening to our students. Not all art programs have a budget for bringing artists into the

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classroom. This is the beauty of social networking via Skype. If paying artists for their time is the main obstacle, then I wouldn't worry so much. You'd be surprised how many artists would be more than happy to share a half hour of their time to speak with aspiring artists.

## Making Connections

At Sheboygan North High School, our focus is to prepare our students to be college- and career-ready after graduation. This will look different from one teacher to another. For our art department, it's about connecting our students to artists who are doing what they love—making the world a better place through art. Through this interaction, students develop their own questions, listen to constructive

## Essential questions that we address to prepare for Skype discussions:

- What conditions, attitudes, and behaviors support creativity and innovative thinking?
- What inspires people to make art?
- How do artists determine what resources and criteria are needed to formulate aesthetic investigations?
- How do technologies influence how we share and experience images and works of art?
- What criteria might be considered when selecting a work for a collection or portfolio?
- How do images influence our views of the world?
- How do life experiences influence the way we relate to art?
- How does learning in the arts help us build relationships with others?

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The Midwest Artist Studios Project is a unique initiative that connects artists across the United States through a series of virtual sessions. These sessions are designed to provide artists with a platform to share their work, discuss their creative process, and receive feedback from other artists. The project is led by Frank Juarez, who is the art department chair at Sheboygan North High School in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He is also a contributing editor for SchoolArts. The project is a great way for artists to connect with each other and to learn from one another. It is a free service that is available to all artists who are interested in participating. To learn more about the project, visit [midwestartiststudios.com](http://midwestartiststudios.com).

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criticism, take the feedback and apply it to their work, and take ownership of their own success.

Creating your own series will take time, patience, and a clear vision of what type of art and artists you want to expose your students to. I find myself attracted to artists whose works are thought-provoking, material driven, exploratory, and nontraditional. This can include paintings, mixed media, collage, sculpture, installation, and drawing, to name a few. Not to mention, curating, archiving, networking, marketing, and the business side of art are important topics to touch upon as well.

### Skype Session Series

This school year, I decided to launch a Skype Session Series. This is one way to open my students' eyes to the world of possibilities. Some of the artists who will join us via Skype are Joe Bussell (KS), Andrea Guzzetta (CA), Jenniffer Omatz (OH), Jay Riggio (CA), Jason Rohlf (NY), Jane Ryder (IA), and Laura Sims Peck (WI).

In art education, we often say that we provide our students with a well-rounded education. What does this look like today in your classroom? 🐞

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### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Connecting: Relate artistic ideas and work with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.*

### WEB LINK

Midwest Artist Studios Project:  
[midwestartiststudios.com](http://midwestartiststudios.com)

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