

Alumni Arts Festival Celebrates the Work of Imagination

Will Robinson, Nov 13 2013

The world's most memorable works of art all begin with a willingness to simply try something new and see what happens. What ultimately defines a masterpiece is that "what happens" is groundbreaking, inspiring, and awe-inducing. Logic would then require the School's first Alumni Arts Festival held over Homecoming weekend to be considered a masterpiece of the highest order. The ambitious course of the weekend was unprecedented and the execution collided head-on with the excited generosity of returning alumni artists and the unbridled enthusiasm of students, parents, and faculty.

Cora Currier '05 kicked off the weekend with a noonday Chapel talk encouraging students to find art in their daily lives wherever life may take them. Currier, who writes for the independent news agency ProPublica, is considered one of the brightest young investigative journalists on national security issues in America. Still, she finds time to work on her poetry and hopes to one day soon publish a collection of poems.

That evening, the Warner Gallery hosted an opening of Alumni paintings, photographs, sculptures, ceramics, and even costume design delivered from around the world. The unique event included introductions from each artist before the floor was opened to student questions. "Each piece was different from the next, but they all worked in harmony with each other," said Arts Department Co-Chair John McGiff who curated the exhibit.

Students and guests were then treated to the Haroldson Concert featuring the Cypress String Quartet. The quartet spent most of the day teaching master classes to members of the St. Andrew's Orchestra before treating the community to two of Beethoven's quartets. (You can watch the quartet's performance on our [Livestream page](#).)

Filmmaker Eva Sayre '97 provided the weekend's keynote address the next morning where she detailed the evolution of her career in international consulting and working on the United Arab Emirates real estate investment team to building Veritas films with her husband, Mahmoud Kaabour. Their first documentary, *Grandma, A Thousand Times*, screened in over 55 cities worldwide, winning seven major Audience awards and Best Film awards in London, Mumbai, Mexico City, Qatar, China, and Syria. It achieved the broadest distribution ever by a documentary from the Arab world, and made history by completing the first Academy Awards qualification campaign for a film produced in the UAE. Sayre shared her excitement for their current film, *Champ of the Camp*, which offers an unprecedented look into the lives of the millions of Indian and Pakistani laborers living in camps on the outskirts of Dubai.

More than 30 alumni then offered workshops for students, faculty, parents, and fellow alumni in the creative and visual arts. *LA Times* entertainment writer Meredith Blake '97 led a group in analyzing scenes from some of the best television shows of the past decade, Georgie Devereaux '01, who recently won the Academy of American Poetry prize, taught poetry, Kathy DeMarco van Cleve '84 took time off from her writing and teaching creative writing at the University of Pennsylvania to lead a writing workshop. Recent Alfred P. Sloan Award winner Dan Hasse '10 taught Shakespearean stage fighting and Tony Award-winning actor Phil Smith '83 taught acting lessons. Another workshop leader, Paul Bramble '95, is a construction executive by day, but pursues his interest in wildlife photography and just had a photograph published in *National Geographic*.

Some two-hour workshops continued well into a third hour with students working to take full advantage of the opportunities to learn from alumni who traveled to campus from around the world and were happy to oblige.

"I think it may have been the best weekend I have ever spent at St. Andrew's," proclaimed Jamie O'Leary '14. "I loved hearing Cora Currier and Eva Sayre and learning about the incredible things they've done with their lives. I especially loved my workshop with Peter Salett. We wrote lyrics and then he helped us transform them into songs playing on our strengths finding a way to involve everyone in it. I felt so lucky to work with him during a weekend that was more incredible than I could have ever imagined."

The weekend was presented by the St. Andrew's Women's Network and led by the tireless work of Bernadette Devine '99, Elizabeth Roach, John McGiff and Amy Kending.