Maris ... an art technique invented for painting appreciation by the blind has become a tool for inspiring the sighted toward greater compassion and world peace.

Liku Maria Takahashi
LIKU MARIA TAKAHASHI
ART WORKS
These experiences provided by Maris are opportunities to encounter a realm of Love & Peace that transcends ablebodiedness, ethnicity, gender, and all other distinctions that lead to discrimination. In philosophical terms, my art creates encounters where paintings plant the seeds of understanding.

I am now preparing to launch an art movement of Love & Peace across Europe in 2020. Focused on Paris, this movement will use the power of art to make the world a kinder place.

From the 1970s to the mid-1980s Joseph Beuys endeavored to use art as a force for changing the world for the better. Over the years, I have made the ideals he expressed the foundation of my work, but I have also reshaped them with my own belief that art completely transcends politics and religion.

My vision of art strips away the political and religious aspects from Beuys’ concepts, and replants the underlying mysticism and philosophical thinking of Rudolf Steiner in a soil of ancient Japanese animism and Bushido.

Deeply inspired by Beuys’ concept of ‘social sculpture’—regardless of any distinctions between East and West—I use my art as a medium for conveying messages on how we can create an ideal society.

Art leads us to new discoveries. And, it has the power to change the world.

Maris is a type of painting and a technique that lets every person, even the visually-impaired see the artworks. It was invented by Liku Maria Takahashi, in 2009, and has been promoted all over the world. Maris expresses the brightness of colors through the size of the sand grain, which are divided into 10 levels. The darker a color gets, the coarser a grain becomes. The hue is expressed through herb essential oils that are applied to the canvas. For instance, purple is the scent of lavender, green is one of sage, and orange is one of oranges.

1. Maris is a form of sand painting. It is the world’s first painting method designed to be accessible to everyone, regardless of visual ability. The sand’s textures and scents enable blind people to “see” the colors and shapes depicted.

2. The brightness of colors is defined by sand grain size, all mapped out in the Maris World Standard Table. (Invented by contemporary artist Liku Maria Takahashi in 2009, patented in Japan).

   1) Grain size = Monochromatic painting (85% of color information)

3. The coarser the grain is, the darker the tone represented. Each color used—red, yellow, or whatever—is expressed by a specific scent.

   (Paintings measuring at least 10 x 5 cm)

   1) Grain size + 2) Scent = Colorful Painting (10% of color information)
Maris National Flag Project

Sandpainting, the use of colored sand to create artistic images, is an art form that has been practiced for centuries in many parts of the world, as seen in some styles of Tibetan mandalas and Easter iconography. The Maris Method, invented in 2009, adds a new dimension to sandpainting by making paintings accessible to people with visual impairments. Sand colored with acrylic paint is affixed to a canvas, with the size of the grains (10 levels in all) providing a tactile clue to the shade of each color.

Since 2012, an ongoing collaborative project has been creating Maris paintings of the world’s 193+1 national flags and the Refugee Flag. As they place the sand on the canvas, participants are asked to think about not only the needs of blind people, but also the happiness of the people represented by each flag. To date, some 10,000 participants have wished for the happiness of 1.5 million people by placing 1.5 million grains of sand on 100 flag paintings, 60 of which have been completed.

This hands-on workshop provides both kids and adults with a fun and easy opportunity to experience the technique and concept of the Maris Method. Participants work together to create a Maris picture of the flag of a country other than theirs. As they form the picture, they are encouraged to wish for the happiness of the people of that country.

Launched in 2012, the Maris 203 + 1 project aims to complete all 206 national flags of the world, plus the Refugee Nation flag created for the contingent of refugees who competed in the 2016 Summer Games in Rio. To date, some 50 flag pictures have been created at 38 workshops held in Japan and abroad.
MARIS Paintings
World Peace from Art
We wish blind people and children at schools for the blind in the world would enjoy Maris paintings together with sighted people. We want them to have an experience to see paintings, a major form of art.

How wonderful it would be if blind people and children at schools for the blind can see paintings with their fingers as children of hearing-impaired listen to music through their bone conduction!

Although there are things that can not be easily done, we will retain kindness by making impossible possible and communicating through art. That will surely bring peace to the world.

Projects of Maris
Maris aims to create an ideal society through art, which idea is influenced by Joseph Beuys (1921 - 1989) ※ 1.

※ 1 A German artist, a sculptor, a pedagogue of art, and a social activist.

Projects of Maris 1
We wish to provide an experience of seeing paintings for people of visually-impaired in the world. A painting technique of Maris ※ 2 can make it possible.

※ 2 The Maris World Standard Table is universal like staff in music.

Projects of Maris 2
We plan to circulate Maris paintings among schools for the blind in the world.

Projects of Maris 3
Starting from advanced countries, we hope to introduce Maris to an elementary school art textbook and curriculum, and by doing so, we hope to foster understanding of diverse society at childhood.

Projects of Maris 4
We aim to create a work place for any type of physically impaired people by building a painting material factories of Maris in countries where Maris is introduced to an elementary school curriculum.

Projects of Maris 5
At least one in each country, we plan to build a lighthouse for people of visually-impaired. That is, we build a home for the blind aged ※ 3, targeted for people over 45 years old (accepting a married couple one of which is blind). With it, we hope to protect a human rights of blind people to spend a fruitful life by removing anxiety and reducing cost of aging.

※ 3 There is such a home in each prefecture in Japan that is produced by Akio Honna, the chairman of the National Committee of Welfare for the Blind in Japan. A society where blind people can spend a life without any worry will be a society that is kind to any type of physically impaired people.

As we get kinder to each other even a little by little, a war will end, and a sky, a mountain and an ocean will recover its true power. The nature and the human beings will surely regain its true magnificence.

May 7, 2015 Artist
Liku M. Takahashi
enery of galaxy

2014 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | 53 × 45.5cm
©Liku M. Takahashi
I re-painted Mona Lisa just down to her feet as the terrible events of March 11, 2011 took place while I worked on the concept of this work and how my Mona Lisa took shape.

The flood was painted on the blurred background of the original Mona Lisa. My re-painted ‘Mona Lisa’ was also standing at a sandbar as well where the floods were seen on her both right side and left side, which however I just learned when I finished this work.

The background of original Mona Lisa had somehow reminded me of the Fukushima nuclear power plant No.1 disaster when I had an idea to work out this project.

I decided to re-paint the Mona Lisa, the painting which is so iconic that those who developed visual impairment in later life would most likely have seen it before at some point in their lives.

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"Flower of Life" is one of famous figures in sacred geometry that Leonardo da Vinci also studied and left his own drawings of the figure.

Receiving the undulation from the universe, Liku Takahashi drew the figure that is handed down from the pre-ancient civilizations and holds everything exist inside.

The energy from the gold and the deep blue color in this series of works intensifies more the power of "Flower of Life." Whirls, on the other hand, show the wise providence of the universe that absorbs or radiates the energy unconditionally.

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"Flower of Life" itself appears as a door of the unseen future and a symbol of the beginning.

Applying crystals of different sizes to the background of two works (the second and the third from left), I created an art of "whirls that are definitely visible for blind people though not clear for people who just look at them". Applying crystals of different sizes to the background, I created an art of "whirls that are definitely visible for blind people though not clear for people who just look at it". This series of works asks us what it means by "observe."

Bringing different interpretations to each observer, the works may evoke a weird feeling as if they reflect a figure of the observer him/herself like a mirror.

I believe many people have thought at one point in their lives, "Anything that lives in this world, including any human being of course, exists as a part of the whole world.

A role of human beings could be extremely important as the only livings on the earth with intelligence that recognizes the existence of the universe.

At the same time, the existence of the earth in the universe itself has its significance.

It must be all up to how we live that decides whether we become cancers or white blood cells, which we originally are, for this mother earth.

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In the sacred geometry "Flower of Life," which Drunvalo Melchizedek has been said to have solved, holds every single aspect of all livings.

It includes mathematical formulas, physical laws, harmonics, living actions, things in the level of atoms and molecules.

There are 19 circles in "Flower of Life," and itself is encircled with two concentric circles outside.

Star sand was provided especially for this work with great favor of Okinawa Ishigaki Tourism Association.
Judy I

2012 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | 72.5 × 35.3(㎝)
©Liku M. Takahashi
Judy II

2012 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | 72.5 × 42.9 (cm)
©Liku M. Takahashi
Protective coloration against lion attack

2012 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | M30 60 × 90 (cm)
©Liku M. Takahashi
Jonathan Livingston Seagull in Japan

2012 | painting (sand, acrylic paint) | 103 × 72 cm

© Liku M. Takahashi
A comment from Masaki Takemiya

First of all, I was overwhelmed with its massive existence.
I believe artworks must touch our souls at first glance. The same thing can be said for the world of Go. Although the ability to “read ahead” is often emphasized in Go, we rely on our intuition first and then start to read and analyze the movements.

That is, sensibility is essential in Go as well. I think the amazing cosmos is captured in this artwork. I mean, the idea of transforming the Go movements by Shusaku (Hon-inbo) through nine dragons strikes me as brilliant. It has a magnificent scale and mysterious beauty.

I am thrilled to imagine that artworks like this will become a bridge between Go and people who are not yet familiar with the world and will bring them much closer than before. This probably is the first attempt ever in the long history of Go to introduce the world of Go through artworks. It is definitely a wonderful project.

Masaki Takemiya (Go player, 9 dan, The Nihon Ki-in)
This Sunae consists of layers of "Present," "Past," and "Future." The "Present" is described with the white flowers, falling down like snow.

The "Past" is the big flower in the center of the work with the blue background. The "Future" is the inside of the "Past," peeking through the "Present" and the "Past."
We have too many things we can't understand. Those answers make future of human history eternity. It’s like a railroad. I think we have the works of making railroad is the symbol of just being human. You make understanding little by little. Like making a railroad.

Rainbow series July of 2009, Liku M. Takahashi painted the original pieces (acrylic). One of them was shown at her own exhibition in New York. And in September the paintings were changed into Maris format. She is going to donate works to major Braille libraries in the world.
What's the meaning of realization? (rainbow series)

2010 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | 1 M30 60 × 90 (cm)
©Liku M. Takahashi

What's the meaning of knowing, understanding and realization? The meaning of them are different to each person. If you think about "what's you don't realize?" You can get the answer easier. Even understanding it is one thing in our life. Therefore it has worth and hope that the existence, we have huge things what we don't know.

Rainbow series
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How to Swim in your Stripes Sea

2010 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | 1 M30 60 × 90 (cm)
©Liku M. Takahashi

I came to the sea with my friends. Only today nobody scolded me because there is not a swimming pool. There are no instructors with strict face and whistle.

Where is your stripe sea? Let's go to the striped sea. Stripe lines are your own rules, when you go, you'll have your new friends, and swim the same rules.

Those rules will hopefully, go on the absolute truth.
chocolate mint ice cream

2010 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | M30 90 × 60(㎝)
©Liku M. Takahashi
The twittering of some birds, tell the squall has just finished.
Green trees and the leaves and flowers refresh themselves with pride, and become shining and bright by the drops of water from the welcome rain.

February 9th in 2009 "After Welcome Rain, Rainbow Flowers No.1, Maris 60x180cm M30x2" was denoted to Japan Braille Library.

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And in September the paintings were changed into Maris format. She is going to donate works to major Braille libraries in the world.
It is the image that wind which blows through the trees at the Central Park in New York City in early summer.

While working on this piece, I lined up this Mint series in front of the window to see the vision of the works when it is completed.
At that moment, I felt that a scent of mint floated into the room as wind blew.
This series is significant since it was a prompt for me to come up with Maris.

Country road series
The acrylic works of mint and cherry blossom that were exhibited with "After Welcome Rain" at the New York exhibition in July 2009. Since NYC is an origin of the worldwide recession, this work is meant to carry a message; "a yell for people who have come from their homelands and families to make their lives in this big city." Right after my return, I converted these works into Maris, and it was the moment when Maris came to the world for the first time.
cherry blossom (country road series)

2009 | Maris (sand, acrylic paint) | 1 M30 × 2 60 × 90(㎝)
©Liku M. Takahashi

It is a series that represent Japanese national flower, cherry blossom. Worked through a unique coloring combination of blue and pink. The design conceptualized during spring in last year, and I waited for the next season for cherry blossom to actualize it as a piece of art. It has become a series due to my desire to bring little Japanese scent into New York.

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The Eva, synchronized with you, began to move.

Ride in the head of Evangelion Unit 01.
We all excuse when we want to run away, "I am not strong enough; I can’t do it."
If you can control a giant robot as you wish in the cockpit, you could do anything.
Everyone would certainly think that you are a powerful man.
When you sit in the cockpit and close the Eva, however, the huge, orange eyes of Eva will stare at you, who are now shut in the pitch-black and have nowhere to escape.

Then you start hearing your own heartbeat...

"Don’t run away"
The Eva speaks to you like one of the Angels, speaks to the deep bottom of your hidden thoughts.
A conversation with yourself: a conversation only those who want to ride in the Eva can have.
The red sphere is a planet as well as your own self. When you enter the planet, you will be surrounded by a number of stars.

Then, your heartbeat will shake the planet, which leads to the floor, the ceiling, and the wall of the gallery, and to the building itself.

Everything that exists in this universe does exist to me only because I exist in the universe.

I think; therefore, I am. That is Geocentricism.

There are thousands of holes made on the surface of the red, FRP-made sphere. Inside the sphere, you will be surrounded entirely with the bright lights coming through the tiny holes.

You might feel as if you were floating in space. Behind the white chair in the middle, there is 400W speaker placed. When someone sits on the chair and attaches clips of PCG to his/her ear, the rhythm of his/her heartbeat comes out from the giant speaker, and echoes in the heavy, low pitch, inside of the sphere and the entire gallery.
Inside of this white, cubic chair, there are a PCG and a speaker that can produce a heavy, low pitch sound.

As someone sits on the chair, he/she looks like he/she has become a part of the chair.

The sun is yourself.

Because you are here, the world you know exists can exist.
Because the sun is here, the solar system and the living creatures on the earth can exist.

This is a work to express the majesty of human existence in a very simple way.

A Throne of the Sun

2007 | heart beat sensor, bass encloser, plywood, nylon cloth, sponge | 1.2 × 1.8 × 0.9(m)
©Liku M. Takahashi
A shower of lights comes out of two water faucets. A shower from one of the faucets goes straight down on a flower below, and a shower from the other faucet scatters and can not reach the flower.

We all have to make our own choices in order to keep the sun shed light on flowers on the earth as it has been.

2045. "This is the year," one scholar warned in the spring of 2007, "when the ice on the South Pole and the North Pole will all melt."

It was reported on medias, too. A lens set outside gathers the sunlight, and fiberglass in the faucet leads the light to the edge. Depending on the shape of the water drop at the edge of each faucet, the sunlight either goes straight down or scatters.
Two chairs at the beach whose erotic shapes remind us of the tongue that has been a trademark for the Rolling Stones.

Lying down on the chairs, what would you think?

Most people sit in the shade for sun bathing, avoiding the sunlight, and choose the other chair for moon bathing to fully receive the moonlight.

This work is meant to inspire the audience to think of environmental issues while they take the natural actions. Wish you as family, a couple, or alone, would think of the relationship among the ocean, the nature, and the human beings while having fun with the ocean wind, the sun, and the moon.
bloom field

2006 | model: glass, crystal, marble | 50 × 50 (cm)
©Liku M. Takahashi

Give moxibustion to the earth.
Place a couple of the artwork in the picture above to places that are suggested by Feng Shui theory.

This is like giving moxibustion to the earth. The glass bowl in the middle contains five magnifying lenses. This artwork is based on humorous wish that the earth, worn out by human beings, may become a bit healthier if the sunlight goes through the lenses to the core of the earth.

The five houses surrounding the glass bowl are where dragons reside. Five dragons from five Confucius elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water) are protecting the bowl.
This artwork is a representation of Confucius theory, the five elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water).

Crystal is placed on the top of each pyramid, which is made by colored glass. The sunlight goes into the crystal first, passes through the colored glass pyramid next, and then hits a T shaped steel pipe, which is placed inside of the marble pillar. Led by a copper wire, a part of the sunlight goes to the underground, and the other, by a reflecting board, comes out from the glass windows, placed on the side of the pillar.

The light comes out from the glass windows that are angled to the middle of the artwork, and reaches the pentagonal floor in the middle.

At the center of the pentagonal floor, there is a round, tempered glass for us to sit on. As we sit, the light will hit beneath naval point, which is one of "elixir points (important focal points)" for Chinese internal meditative techniques.
Having his routine works done as best as he can, a businessman joins the member of the society.

Suddenly wonders, "what kind of future would this lead to..."

"Right after he thinks of it, however, he straights his suit and tie, and goes back to his routine.

Maybe there is another dimensional value that no one has taught and is undiscovered to him exists in this lifestyle.

Then the businessman hops around the undiscovered world, though for him it simply looks he is walking on a routine road in the chilly breezesince he hasn't discovered the dimension yet.
Living in a city is like walking in a labyrinth. Before the entrance, we can see the exit and even a tree over the exit, but once we are in the labyrinth, we are surrounded by walls. As we look up, there is a rectangular blue sky cut out by the labyrinth walls.

Sometimes we can see a part of the tree at the exit in the rectangular sky, and gradually regains the sense for right direction to the exit.

So, let’s walk with our faces up! The exit is located on the straight line from the entrance, but blocked by several walls of glasses. The walls designed with the various colors of empty cans may appear as the ruins of the dehumanized city.

We can push mirrored doors in the labyrinth to move into the other side but can never come back, for there is no door knob to pull the doors. The reflection of ourselves in the mirror is surrounded entirely by the walls.
On a huge red wine rack, there are bottles filled with "ether.
There are 100 bottles on one side, and the same for the other.
Each bottle on one side corresponds to the one on the other side.
A pair of bottles has the same transparent sticker on which printed an individual’s birth year, his/her smiling picture, and a line that reads “made by cosmo.”

Every human being has his/her parallel world at the same time as he/she lives in the current world.
In our thinking, anything could go anywhere, and we can also beam our thoughts to the universe and even to another dimensional world.
When we are asleep, we might travel through a warp hole to another world.
Why do we exist in this world carrying a pair of body suits called “human being”?

That is to learn, and to engrave what we have learned in our souls, for not to forget.
That is, we need to ferment our souls like we do for wine.

Our souls can travel beyond time and space. Having waited for ages, they gain the time for learning when they receive their own houses called “human being.”
That is the only time when a soul can grow and absorb learning.
That is, the soul is laid on a wine rack and brought to higher quality like a bottle of wine.
What do we feel when we die?
At the moment when a soul is released from the body, things you have learned in this life will be condensed to the essence and will be engraved in your soul as “learning” at last.

A reincarnating soul will remember the joy of gaining new body while seeing the sunrise, and will remember the dignity of learning upon death while seeing the sunset. Even today, the elders in Japan’s countryside pray for every sunset as if they unconsciously prepare to add “appreciation to all” into the things to be engraved in their souls.

In Tibet, lamas pray for the dead for 49 days so that the soul can be engraved with the learning and can be guided to the next step.
I will cut off my life and sell parts of it.

*Note: please play with them as you wish.
The skeletons inside of the fridge are all somewhat distorted, though they are from the same mold. Since they are made with polyurethane, they are unexpectedly soft and have weird texture that reminds us of human flesh.

Next to the fridge posted a note saying, "Please play with them as you wish." Having graduated from schools, all rookies are alike. Whether they could get a job they like or ended on one they never imagined, there is a client at the work.

You work now as they like you to do, but one day you build up your career and a client come with a huge project, asking you to do "whatever you like to do!"
Portrait of father

1989  clay
©Liku M. Takahashi
# Maris National Flag Project (as of 2019.5.20)

**Decorate action**

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<td>2019.4.22-25</td>
<td>#37</td>
<td>Paris France</td>
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<td>2019.4.27-5.8</td>
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Building a compassionate society through contemporary art
Art can make special contributions not possible through politics or religion. Conceived in Japan, the Maris National Flag Project is an educational art program that seeks to inspire compassion across the globe—with each grain of sand standing for one person’s hope to make the world a better place. By having people view and make national flag paintings together, the project creates opportunities for everyone to think about what we can do to promote world peace and diversity.

Appreciating paintings: An enriching experience
When we view paintings, our eyes send signals to the brain, whose chemistry converts the stimuli into joy and other profound emotions. In fact, colors affect our mood—the legendary color theorist Johannes Itten (1888-1967) taught that bright colors raise our spirits while darker ones calm us. Because of such effects, painting appreciation is an excellent way to enrich our minds and hearts.

Much more needs to be done for the visually impaired
People with visual impairments need to have opportunities to experience paintings. Sadly, however, that need goes unnoticed among sighted people, including those in the art world, as we have learned from hosting Maris workshops around the globe.

Today, support for people with disability tends to focus on material assistance. By adding cultural and artistic support, we can create a more well-rounded package of aid that helps people with disability to enjoy the truly enriched life that all people deserve, both materially and intellectually.

Reaching out to the sighted
Maris National Flags of the World seeks to plant the seeds of respect for the human rights of visually impaired people, and grow that respect into a wave of compassion that reaches across the globe.

Participants’ Stories 1
The World’s Largest School for the Blind
"Without limit"
This is a core value of the Perkins School for the Blind, the world’s largest school for the blind and the alma mater of Helen Keller. In 2010, the year after she invented the Maris Method, Liku Maria Takahashi visited Perkins to give a special lecture on her technique. The junior high principal at the time had decided to let the children at the school judge whether Maris art had value for blind people. Some 17 junior high school students interested in paintings were invited to the lecture and given the opportunity to experience three Maris works. They slowly examined the paintings one by one, with each spending about five minutes per work, while their peers politely awaited their turns in three lines. As soon as the first three children began exploring the paintings with their fingertips, their faces lit up with joy. “I can see it! This is a painting of a railroad. Did you come from Japan on a train, Maria?” said a student checking out Railway (2010; currently part of the Perkins Museum’s collection and on permanent exhibit). Another student proclaimed, “This peppermint-smelling flower is a peppermint-colored flower, isn’t it? I like this painting of flowers the most of the three, because there are so many flowers in it!” After the students finished enjoying the art, they gleefully asked a barrage of questions, so many that the junior high principal, two art teachers, and Liku Maria’s interpreter had to step in and help explain the paintings. Before anyone realized it, the lecture ran past its allotted time of one hour, as students continued to ask about the paintings and the colors used. Liku Maria received many comments, including: “Thank you, Maria. I’ve gained a new experience.” “I had thought I’d never be able to experience paintings.”

“I hope you will keep painting many artworks and show them to us.”

The children’s excitement over the paintings profoundly resonated with Liku Maria, becoming a wellspring for her artistic activities in the ensuing years.
South America’s Largest School for the Blind

Rio de Janeiro’s Instituto Benjamin Constant, the largest school for the blind in South America, was the site of a Maris exhibition in the summer of 2016, just as the city was hosting the Paralympics. Held in the school’s gallery, the exhibition attracted a wall-to-wall crowd to its opening party, and was viewed by some 2,500 visitors during its course. The state-run TV Brasil covered the first day of the show, which was also the first day of the Paralympics. That evening, the broadcaster presented scenes of the exhibition, along with their coverage of the Games’ opening ceremony. Due to the heavy turnout, the exhibition was extended another week.

One of the more memorable aspects of the event was that five of the school’s students visited every day—bringing along friends, family, and classmates each time. Among them was a first-year high school student who said that her favorite exhibit was The Declaration of Maris (2016), whose canvas was covered with a huge poppy. “I love this painting the most! I mean, it’s this bright red flower!” the completely blind girl explained matter-of-factly (photo 1). This particular work is a 110-centimeter square, so it takes a lot of fingerwork to explore each grain of sand. It must have been a Herculean task for her to spend hour upon hour tracing the grains and forming a detailed mental picture of the whole. Yet, amazingly she came to the gallery every day of the three-week show and continued her fingertip journey through The Declaration of Maris. Her thirst for knowledge seemed unquenchable. Someday, she just might become Brazil’s own Helen Keller.

Of course, there were students who didn’t seem very keen on paintings in general, but even for them the easily relatable depictions of national flags were a hit. Many were captivated by certain elements of those paintings: the Lebanon cedar of that country’s flag, Switzerland’s white cross, Japan’s rising sun, and so on. And, the flags served as natural teaching opportunities—standing before different paintings, a social studies teacher and a geography teacher spontaneously began giving lessons in their subjects. Even a new flag painting still being worked on fascinated the children. Many of them caressed its surface and voiced their hope for it to be completed soon, saying things like “I can’t wait until it’s finished. I want to see what the whole flag looks like!”

Art for the Working Class, Too

Two Maris art classes were scheduled for the project in Brazil, but three more were added on site due to their immense popularity. Each gathering consisted of two kinds of activities: having the entire group work together on a flag painting in progress, and having each participant create their own special painting on a postcard-sized canvas. The school’s regular art class teaches pottery to adults, so many participants had experience in working with other art forms. Perhaps because of this, some had fun adding lace ribbons, cardboard, and other materials to their paintings.

One of Liku Maria’s indelible memories of the Maris workshops was that of a participant who appeared to be in his mid-30s. The man was apparently a manual laborer, as he was dressed in work clothes. The class marked his first time to take an art lesson at the school, and he seemed to have trouble applying the sand to the flag painting. The three teachers in attendance were unfamiliar with him, but they noticed how he sat with a blank expression, hardly placing any sand on the canvas. One approached him and suggested, “This is an art class, so even if you don’t understand everything, think hard about what to do and try to apply sand in your own way.” Still, something seemed odd about his behavior. It was when Liku Maria tried to guide his hands that the problem became clear. The skin of his fingers was cracked from years of labor, and the crevices had become impregnated with sand and the acrylic paint used as an adhesive base on the canvas. One approached him and suggested, “This is an art class, so even if you don’t understand everything, think hard about what to do and try to apply sand in your own way.” Still, something seemed odd about his behavior. It was when Liku Maria tried to guide his hands that the problem became clear. The skin of his fingers was cracked from years of labor, and the crevices had become impregnated with sand and the acrylic paint used as an adhesive base on the canvas. Yet, he didn’t say a word, just sitting there and enduring the discomfort. Liku Maria dabbed his affected fingers with a steroid ointment she had brought from Japan, and then wrapped them in plastic wrap from the cafeteria.
Participants' Stories 4
An Appeal by One of South America’s Foremost Experts

This exhibition was directed by Maria da Gloria de Souza Almeida, a completely blind professor at Instituto Benjamin Constant and one of South America’s leading experts on education for the blind.

Speaking in an interview afterwards, she faced the camera and said, “Visually impaired people need more than just musical performance as their medium for experiencing art. They also need to experience art appreciation in the form of sculpture and painting. Brazil’s education ministry says that schools for the blind don’t need art classes, but we want to have the pleasure of making paintings and working with different colors and shapes. As humans, we all have the right to enjoy art. The same can be said at all schools for the blind around the world. This is something we want everyone to understand.” As the largest school for the blind in South America, Instituto Benjamin Constant is one of the continent’s leaders in education for the blind.

Gloria continued, “We have always strived to foster awareness of the darkness enshrouding Brazil. In a society where many struggle each day to feed themselves, the rights of people with visual impairments and their hardships in employment still remain largely unaddressed. During the Paralympics, the activities of people with disabilities were covered every day by diverse media outlets, but once the torch was extinguished, TV stations went back to just showing able-bodied people. I want to ask the media to rethink how the Paralympics can reshape our society.”

The Maris art projects at Instituto Benjamin Constant and the world’s largest school for the blind, Perkins, displayed paintings that the sighted and the totally blind could enjoy together. This art opened the door for visually impaired people in the 21st century to experience the world of painting. In the years ahead, Liku Maria will continue to run the Maris Art Project to bring the pleasure of paintings to children at schools for the blind around the globe.
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