

Q&A: Fei Wang

MICA graduate student curates
Park exhibition, "Language+"

by Peter Califano '14

Qianfei Wang, a second-year graduate student from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), has collaborated with the art department to mount Language+, a show that spans all three divisions, and doubles as the thesis exhibition requirement for Wang's MFA in curatorial practice. In this Q&A, Wang explains the nature of the exhibit and how it came to be.

First off, can you explain what exactly Language + is?

Language+: Let's art a conversation! is a two-venue exhibition and a collaborative educational experience which includes a series of programs that explore the potential of art to be a fruitful method of expression and communication. Language+ is partnering with two private schools—Park and Baltimore Lab School, an exceptional arts-infused school for students with learning disabilities—the project aims to celebrate the process of art-making. Based on each school's academic curricula, Language+ offers students from different grades opportunities to express themselves and exhibit new art.

Park School's Lower School art teacher Nancye Hesaltine, second grade teachers Katrina Holmberg, Marilyn Milton and Akua Perprah, Lower School science teacher Laura Jacoby, and performance artist [and Park parent] Liz Pelton worked closely to develop the idea and theme of water for their Language+ workshops. Second graders experienced and researched water through different media, such as performance and dance, drawing, painting, stream-walking, writing diaries and reading. With multiple learning opportunities, students could have an in-depth understanding of water and its role in nature.

In Middle School, seventh grade language arts teachers Elizabeth Hollister, Rommel Loria and Geoff Meyers collaborated with art teacher Ann Haney and

mixed media artist [and Park parent] Julia Kim Smith to help students understand the concept of euphemisms while they were making art. In the seventh graders' Language Arts class, they studied euphemism through reading a book named *The Giver*. With Language+ workshops, students investigated euphemism in a different, hands-on way, and explored the idea of euphemism in-depth.

Upper School students in the Beatz and Design classes collaborated together on a project which encouraged students to think about the relationship between design and music. Both classes began with their own independent projects. Students in Design class created posters based on different words, and explained these words in a visual way with one color as the limitation. Beatz students wrote music based on different words as well.

Language+ invited [Park parent] Ellen Lupton presenting a lecture to both classes about how to think as a designer. Instead of working with a specific artist, all students from Design and Beatz experienced working as artists individually and collaboratively.

At Baltimore Lab School, 10 students from early aftercare had an art workshop every week, and used art as a vehicle to study water, community and art-making. These 10 students also had three opportunities to visit Park, work with Park second graders, and attend a lecture by Laura Jacoby. All Park second grade students and teachers will visit Lab School and experience Language+ when the exhibition is displayed there.



Fei oversaw the installment of the Language+ exhibit, including "Guess the Euphemism," in which students creatively illustrated common sayings and phrases.



photos by B. Knobloch '14

Fei Wang's graduate work at MICA in curatorial practice requires her to mount an exhibition, so she created Language+ in collaboration with faculty and students.

How/why are you doing Language +? Why at Park?

Both Park and Lab School are paragons in contemporary education, following the model John Dewey encouraged in his philosophy. Language+ was inspired by John Dewey and his book *Experience & Education*. Because progressive educational philosophy puts emphasis on each individual's needs and experience, Language+ has engaged students with diverse workshops involving various artistic languages, like movement, art making, design and music.

How did you get the idea for Language +?

I spent a whole semester researching at both schools. That process included visiting different classes, talking with students and teachers, and finding out about their needs and interests.

Based on the two schools' interests and curricula, Language+ invited guest artists and lecturers to work with students

with multiple formats of art making, and offered students the opportunity to conduct their investigation and education in auditory, visual and kinesthetic ways. Language+'s exhibition includes both professional artists and young student-artists without hierarchy among the works of art. Furthermore, the process of art-making is no less significant than the value of the final work, which explains why documentation plays a crucial role in Language+.

As a graduate student from MICA's MFA in Curatorial Practice, I have learned a lot from my program. MICA's MFA in Curatorial Practice is designed to forge connections among art, artists, and the community. The program's collaborative and individual curatorial projects allow students to explore new methods of exhibition presentation—thinking outside of traditional models and training to create relevant, timely and accessible exhibitions for their audiences.

New models will include considering the surrounding community or history of the venue as inspiration when organizing exhibitions. This innovative graduate program is the first MFA in Curatorial Practice in the United States.