



## New Directions in Art Education: The Edwin Ziegfeld Award

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### Introduction

I want to thank the InSEA Awards Committee for this amazing honor. It is humbling to take my place among the previous winners, Ana Mae Barbosa (2006), Michael Day (2008), Rachel Mason (2011); Josip Roca (2014). I am especially honored to receive an award named for InSEA's first president, Dr. Edwin Ziegfeld whose work continues to inform the field of art education.



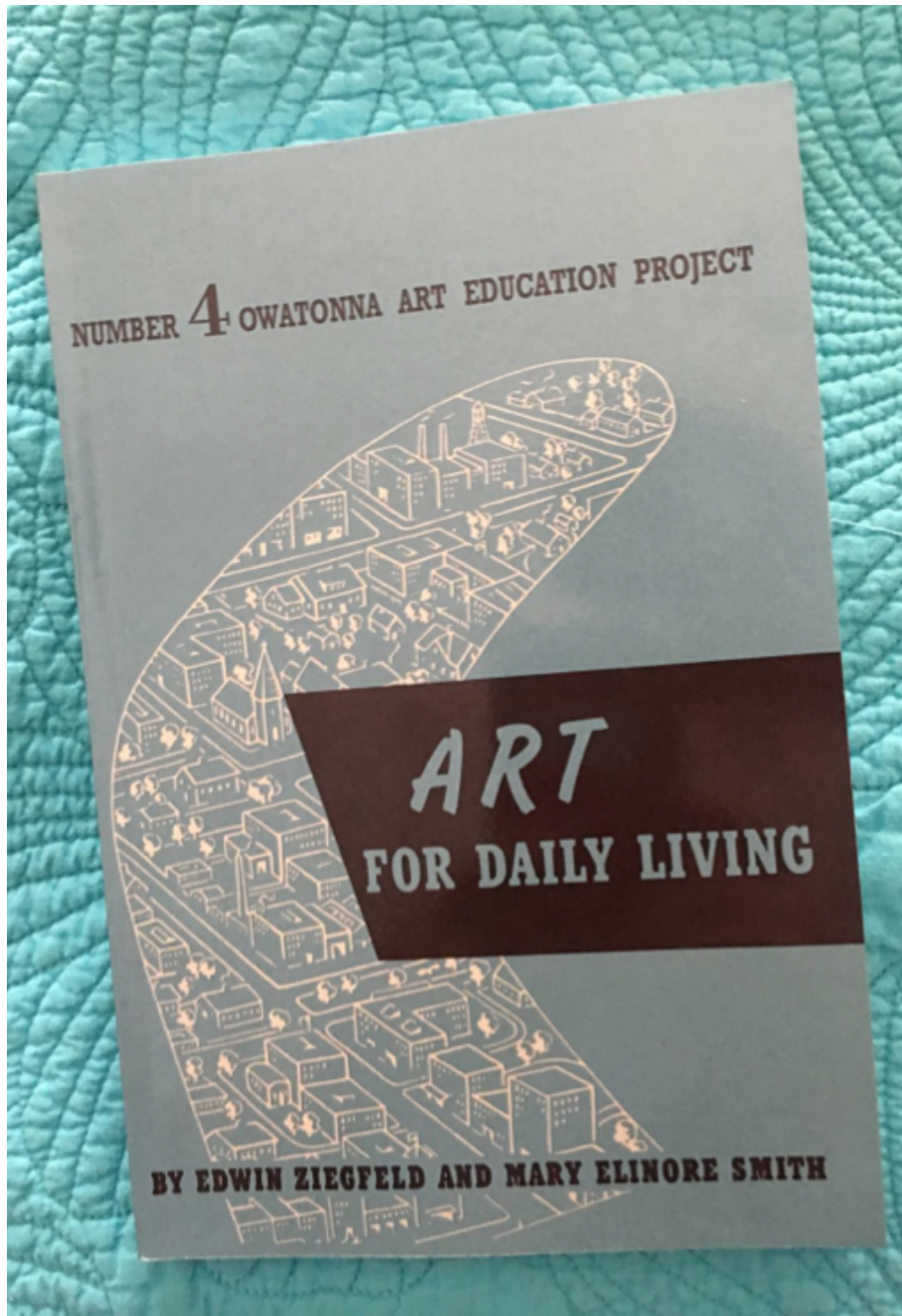
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Dr. Edwin Ziegfeld was the first president of InSEA, serving this organization from 1951-1960. He was an incredibly talented leader and educator, serving as Head and faculty in the Department of Fine and Industrial Arts at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York. He was an active

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author and frequent lecturer all over the world. Aside from the importance of his work for InSEA, he was most proud of the Owatonna Project he participated in from 1933-1938. The Owatonna Project, according to Al Hurwitz (<http://hurwitz.tc.columbia.edu/taxonomy/term/36>) was a "classic example of social reconstructionist or practical life centered curriculum. This project responded to the needs of the citizenry, promoting and advising on home decorations, art in public places, landscaping, and even window display, thus demonstrating that art can be public as well as private and personal as well as utilitarian, and that art teachers are capable of raising the general aesthetic level of an entire community." In this talk, which is to focus on new directions in art education, it's useful to revisit this extensive project in order to look to the future. Edwin Ziegfeld forged new directions in art education including innovations in pedagogy, international collaborations, and research methods which continue to be relevant. His responses, through art, to the needs of the times in which he lived are legendary and can help us understand how art education can continue to be relevant in our own time.

## The Owatonna Art Education Project (1933- 38)

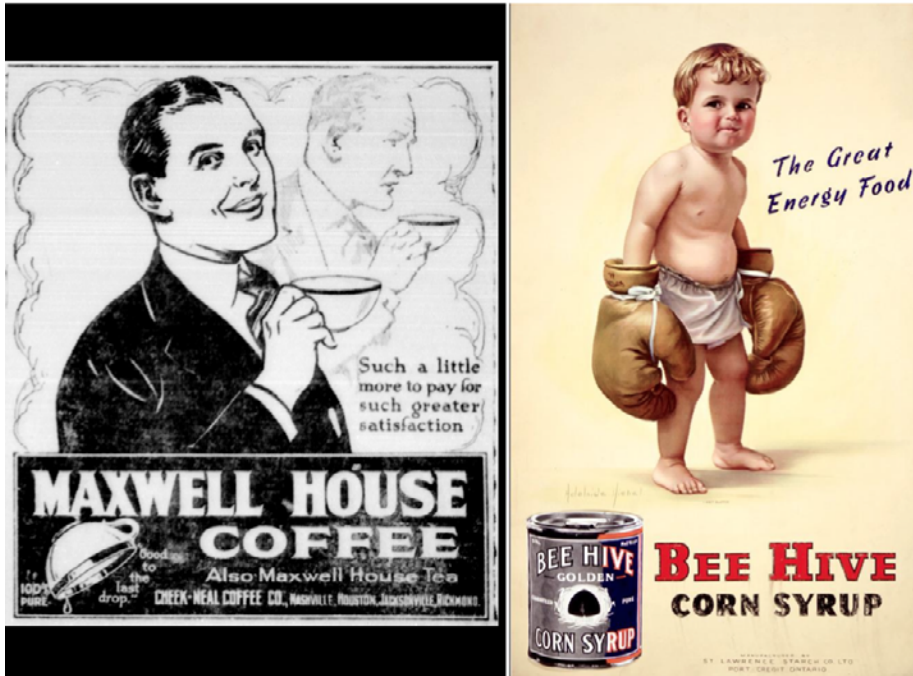


Ziegfeld wrote *Art for Daily Living* in 1944 and explains: The Owatonna Art Education Project came into being in the early nineteen-thirties. At that time, the life of every person in America was shaken by an unparalleled economic depression, just as today the life of every person is being shaken by war. He notes that at every time of crisis, culture becomes skeptical of traditional institutions, including education which causes us to ask: "What programs, what courses are vital to us, to our survival? Which ones ought we to discard because they are, for the present at least, no longer useful?"



Ziegfeld continues: In the 1930s ... many people [came] to the conclusion that art was one subject which could well be spared from the public school curriculum. All over the country art teachers were dismissed because art seemed to be one of education's frills, a pallid luxury-subject without sufficient vitality to be considered essential to the training of children. (p. 1) Sound familiar? While art teachers were being fired, Ziegfeld and others also noticed

that businesses were paying more and more attention to the new field of industrial design and to artists who were hired to design "labels for coffee cans and olive bottles; new packages for toothpastes and corn starch; new containers for face creams and inks; new bodies for automobiles; and even whole new streamlined trains" (p. 2).



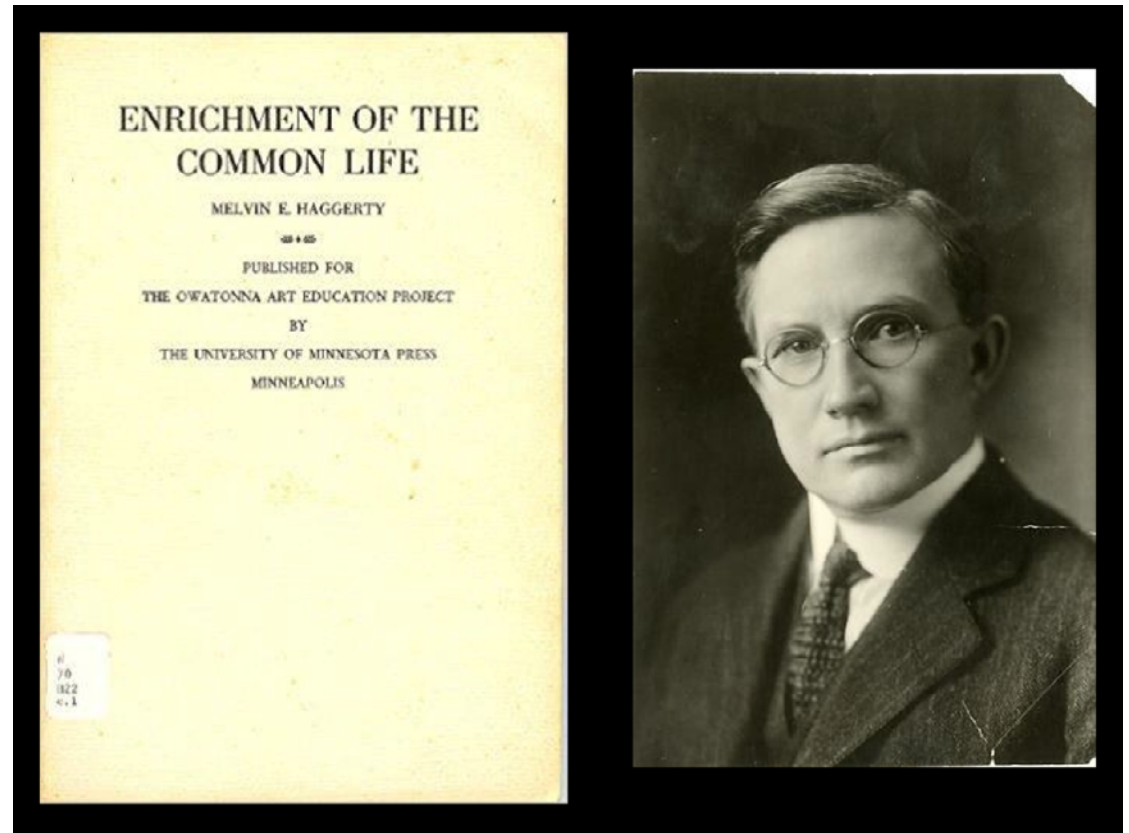
He continues:

Thus, we had a peculiar situation. Art was being withdrawn from courses of study because it was nonfunctional and an expensive luxury, but art was also playing a new and extremely vital part in business and industry. (p. 2)

Melvin E. Haggerty, dean of the College of Education at the University of

Minnesota and director of the project until Ziegfeld took over after Haggerty's

death in 1937, developed the ideas for this experimental project and hired Ziegfeld to be the art supervisor and teacher of art in the high school.



Haggerty wrote:

"Art is a way of life . . . It cannot be detached from life. The impulses which lead to art lie deep in human nature. . .

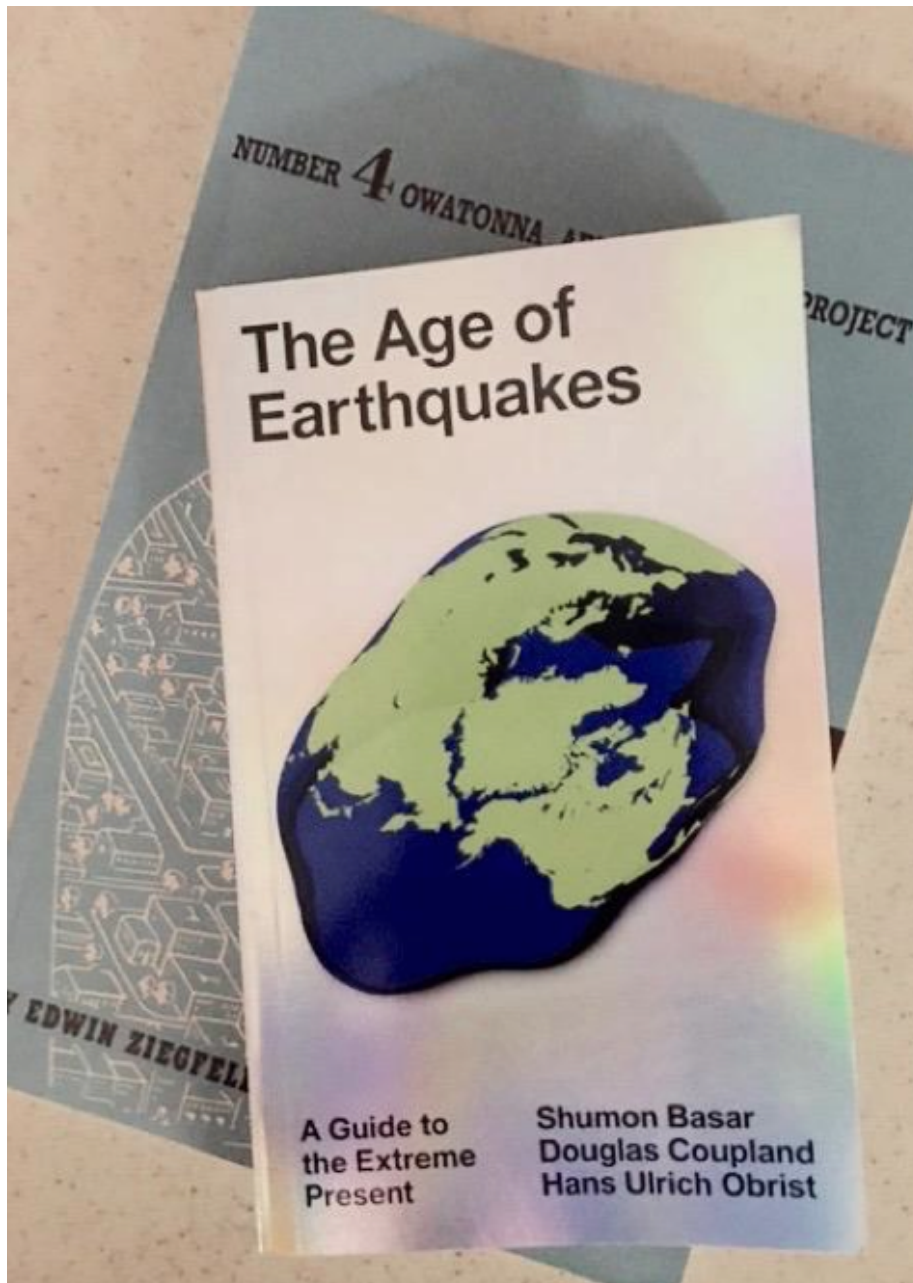
The problem for education in this matter is to discover how the art interests of people create art needs, and to formulate a plan of teaching that is related to these needs in a thoroughly realistic way.

If this could be adequately done, far from appearing as a marginal activity, a kind of parasite upon the school program, art would be recognized as an essential component of a sound educational plan. It would take its place alongside mathematics, science, history and language as a necessary part of the school curriculum, to be fostered and defended as are these better recognized subjects."



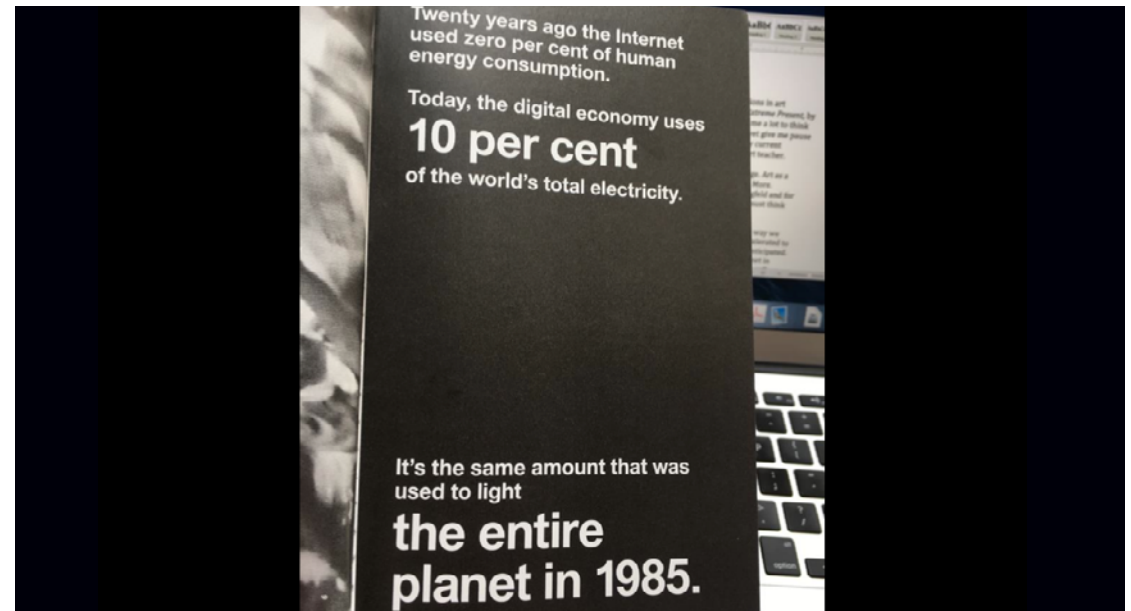
Eventually, they found a “typical” American city for this research in Minnesota called Owatonna and attempted to understand the community’s relationship with art and according to Eisner (1965, p. 80) to develop curriculum “to raise the aesthetic standards of a small community.” Initial funding for the project from the Carnegie Foundation was \$11,000, and there were additional grants over the five years of the project which ended with the start of World War II. The first part of this novel experiment was to discover the part that art played in the life of Owatonna. Ziegfeld lived in Owatonna for the full five years and had up to four researchers with him at all times whose job was to observe, interview, photograph, take detailed notes of their reflections and interactions with the people in this city. Using surveys, questionnaires, and recorded observations, the staff evaluated Owatonna’s homes, gardens, and places of business. They developed surveys and based on their detailed observations, they developed art curricula for elementary through high school, and for community-based lifelong art education which shifted the life of the community.

## The Extreme Present



Ziegfeld worked to make art relevant to his times. The challenge for us is to make it relevant now. While I was trying to figure out how I could actually address “new directions in art education,” I found a book called *Age of Earthquakes: A Guide to the Extreme Present*, by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Douglas Coupland and Shumon Basar. This book gave me a lot to think about. The “extreme present” is a concept that continues to fascinate me, yet give me pause as I re-think (after over 40 years of teaching) about how to engage with my current students whose lives are very different from those students I met as a 21-year-old art teacher. The world has shifted in ways that would be unimaginable for Ziegfeld and even as it would have been for me as a newly licensed art teacher in 1971, when the cell phones, the internet, and digital copiers were still in the future.

The rise of globalization and rapid pace of digital technology have changed the way we know, experience, and participate in our world. Technological progress has accelerated to the point that the future is happening to us far faster than we could ever have anticipated. The internet is changing the structure of our brains and the structure of our planet in extraordinary ways. Obrist and his colleagues write: “This new world is what we call “extreme present,” a time in which it feels impossible to maintain pace with the present, never mind to chart the future” (no page number).



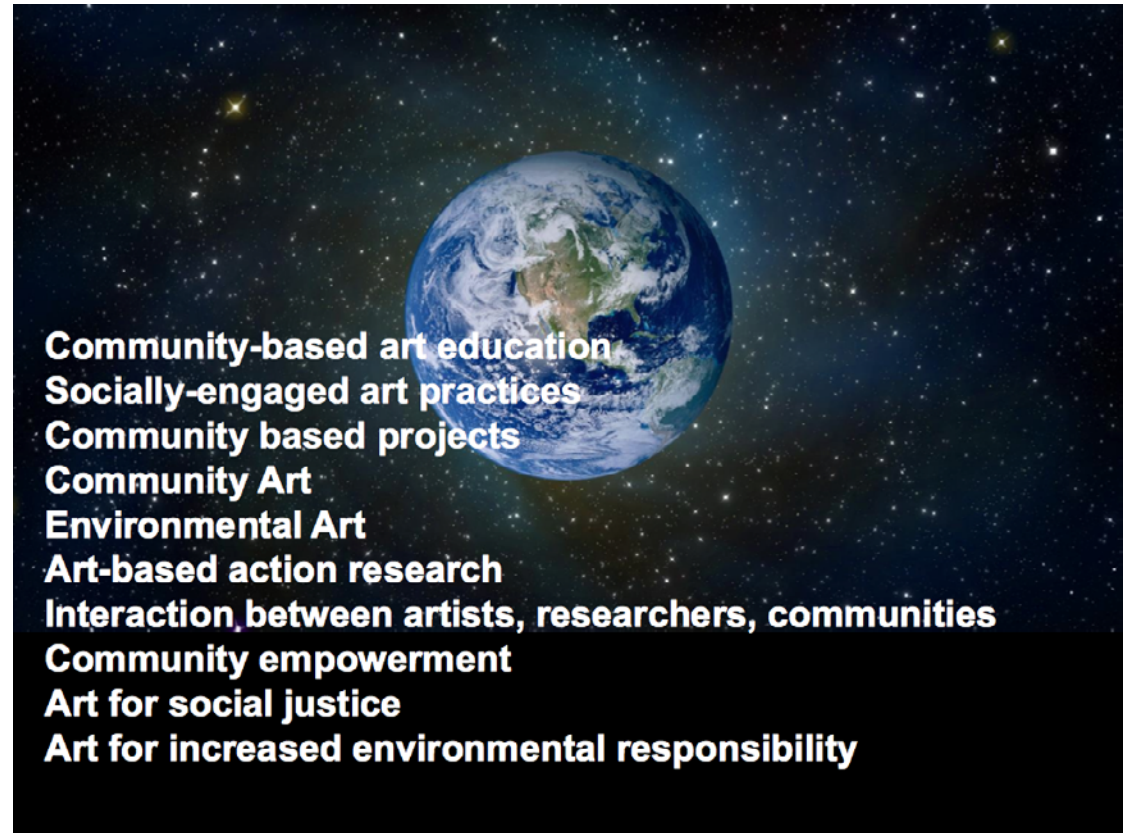
They note that “Twenty years ago the Internet used zero percent of human energy consumption. Today, the digital economy uses 10 percent of the world’s total electricity. It’s the same amount that was used to light the entire planet in 1985.” Wow.

But even with these extraordinary changes, some things remain the same; culturally inclusive art education is still a challenge even in a time of instant communication across cultures, time zones, and language groups.

Ziegfeld believed that culturally inclusive art education fosters tolerance, appreciation, and mutual respect among diverse peoples. Art can still be a vehicle for peace and social justice, and this is as important now as it was in Ziegfeld’s time. These issues still motivate and challenge us as we move to the future in art education.

### **Conclusion**

I urge you all to read Ziegfeld’s Art for Daily Living. The Owatanna Project was not perfect in light of advances in contemporary research methods. But for the 1930s, it was revolutionary and even now, we can consider new directions in art education by looking to the past. In spite of its shortcomings, the Owatanna Project is an amazing example of situated, action research that was intended to meet the needs of the community and the larger culture.



Browsing the literature on art education, research, and curricular experiments can be overwhelming. It becomes imperative to acknowledge the extreme present. What to do in the wake of this new epoch? Do we resist? Or do we work to create new art education experiences that include the needs of communities and global cultures? Our students are ‘digital natives’, and they cannot go back. While there is merit to the anxieties inherent in neo-capitalist enterprises that threaten to obliterate the fundamental tenets of art education, we are at a crossroads, and we must consider the kaleidoscopic spread of the arts in the digital world that Ziegfeld could never have imagined. I believe our challenge is to combine new digital opportunities with the issues Ziegfeld addressed including:

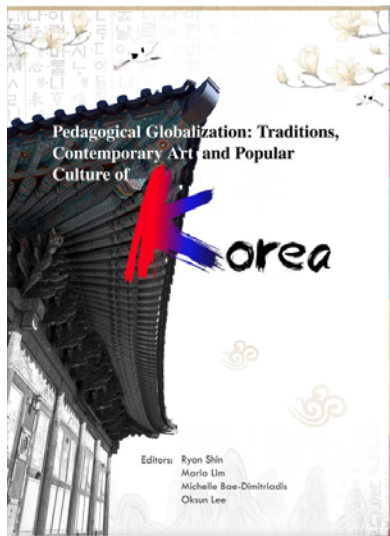
Community-based art education  
Socially-engaged art practices  
Community based projects



Community art  
 Environmental art  
 Art-based action research  
 Interaction between artists, researchers, communities  
 Community empowerment  
 Art for social justice  
 Art for increased environment responsibility

I want to finish by sharing a wonderful new digital book on art education that situates art education directly in the extreme present. The book, *Pedagogical Globalization: Traditions, Contemporary Art and Popular Culture of Korea* is edited by Ryan Shin, Maria Lim, Michelle Bae-Dimitriadis, Oksun Lee. It addresses the history, contexts, and many practices of art education that focus on issues that affect our rapidly evolving global village.

Art education continues to be a critical player in the creation of creative industries, and art educators everywhere have a huge stake in this phenomenon. I believe that this book honors art education traditions while it also exemplifies new directions in art education.



Edwin Ziegfeld was an amazing art educator whose work continues to inform our field which is filled with many dedicated art educators across the globe. I am so honored to have been selected to receive this honor in his name. Thank you for your attention.

#### REFERENCES

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