



Introducing the IEATA December
2022 Member Spotlight:

Dr. Marién Peña



Biography

Art, in some way or another, has been in Marién's life since childhood, whether it was singing in the church while hiding in the last row, attempting to learn how to play an instrument, quietly writing poetry in her room, or making and playing with paper dolls, art gave voice to her sensitive, introvert personality.

Marién was born in Puerto Rico, a country with flamboyant culture, rhythmic music, and a colorful environment, surrounded by emerald-green mountains and turquoise beaches. She migrated to the U.S. to pursue a career in veterinary studies which derailed her to a different path. She obtained a B.A. from the University of Iowa in Art History and Graphic Design, intending to continue graduate studies in Art Therapy. Subsequently, after graduation, she moved for a brief period to the island and then to Central

Florida where she was given the opportunity to become certified as a Montessori teacher. Marién made a career teaching art in Montessori schools, and in 2013 graduated from St. Catherine University with an M.A. Ed. in Montessori Education and became a field consultant for Montessori teacher training centers.

As a Montessori educator, she felt the need to connect students in more meaningful ways to the subject areas in the classroom and to understand nature by learning from its cycles. That need led her to ProjectNature Connect and the studies of Ecopsychology. Marién earned a Ph.D. in Eco-Art Therapy/ Ecopsychology from Akamai University and ProjectNature Connect in 2018.

Through her work as a field consultant, she becomes aware of the support children and teachers need outside their classrooms and the need for stress management tools in the workplace. Marién did not limit her work to school settings as she served adults with Alzheimer's bringing Montessori and art activities to assisted living facilities in Central Florida and created Keeping Children Connected a series of workshops designed for teachers offering tools to engage students with nature.

She is honored to have completed her Expressive Arts Certification through Expressive Arts Florida Institute. Dr. Marién Peña currently serves as an eco-art, expressive arts facilitator, and Ecopsychologist. She lives with her husband, son, and two cats in Sanford, FL.

What drew you to the field of expressive arts?

My interest in the expressive arts was born intuitively. During the process of writing my dissertation, I suffered a stroke. I used all the tools I knew, such as the fine motor skills activities that Montessori offers, spending time in nature, and engaging in creative activities to help me reconnect my body with my mind, improve my motor skills and strengthen my stamina. After completing my dissertation on the use of eco-art therapy and nature connectors to mitigate stress I felt the need to act. Knowing the impact nature, meditation, and artmaking have had in my life, I wanted to share with others the restorative powers of engaging in these activities. I organized a meditation and art group with teachers, where we met weekly and felt the need to learn more about incorporating these practices. In my search for knowledge, I discovered the Expressive Arts and Expressive Arts Florida Institute.

I fell in love with the multimodal process and its power. It provided me with the missing link in my practice as an eco-art therapist. Before, I struggled with transitioning participants from one modality to another during an eco-art therapy session; Now, I can effortlessly guide participants in merging both practices. I am always amazed at how deep and holistic the process can be.



Local group of teachers participating in an Eco-Art Therapy Workshop at White Peacock Interactive Center, Lake Mary, FL.



Participants from Outward Bound USA, participated in an eco-art therapy activity.

How are you implementing multimodal expressive arts in the domains of therapeutic work, artistic practice, consultation, education, and activism?

The expressive arts have become part of who I am. As an artist, having a personal practice has helped me tap into my creativity with ease and judgment-free when creating pieces for local art exhibits. As a professional, I use expressive art in my work as an educator and Ecopsychologist. I work in the community with schools, non-profits, and corporations, as well as individuals by guiding them through nature connectors and the creative process. This fusion has opened opportunities for working online.

Creating space for others to express themselves is one of my goals. Working in my native language and bringing the expressive arts to the Latino community is one of my priorities.

I facilitate Spanish Expressive Arts groups and events online bringing together participants from various locations across de U.S. and Puerto Rico while exploring our authenticity and claiming our heritage.

I am also collaborating with Dave's House, a non-profit organization that helps adults with mental illness get back on their feet by meeting their housing needs. Bringing the expressive arts to Dave's House has provided residents with a safe space for self-expression and personal betterment. This rewarding experience shows me how important our work as facilitators is. I have learned to adapt the process to the needs and capabilities of the participants.

My quaint studio has become a haven for individuals that want to explore the expressive arts in a more intimate setting. I had the opportunity to guide teenagers in their process of self-discovery and mentor teachers who needed focus. Once a month I facilitate a group for teachers where can reconnect and replenish through the creative process.



Artwork by a participant from Outward Bound USA, an outdoor education program for young people, as part of their annual retreat. Wekiwa Springs, FL.

How do you envision your work and artistic practice moving forward?

My goal is to continue spreading the word about the healing power of nature and expressive arts beyond my local community. My focus is to bring awareness to society that the precarious and fragile state of our environment is a reflection of our physical, emotional, and mental state. As long as we continue to view our environment as an entity apart from ourselves we will continue to destroy our sustainability. By showing others how to access nature's wisdom through sensory exploration, empathy, and creativity, and how by embodying nature and nature's cycles we can increase our well-being as well as the planet's.

I will continue fostering teachers' and students' self-efficacy through the creative process whether through conferences, workshops, or individual facilitation.

What are your thoughts on the current role of expressive arts in your region and internationally?

The IEATA conference in 2022 opened my eyes to the reach and amplitude of this work. I am inspired by the extraordinary work being done across the globe. As I dive in, as a newcomer in the field, I still grasp the accessibility and acceptance of expressive arts facilitation in my community yet sense the need for such means of connection and expression.

As someone who struggled with inspiration during art school, I wish colleges offered Expressive arts courses to art students to access creativity as a requisite.



Artwork by a participant from Outward Bound USA, an outdoor education program for young people, as part of their annual retreat. Wekiwa Springs, FL.



Teen participants exploring self-discovery through expressive arts and sagoma (outline) in my studio. Casselberry, FL.



Dave's House collage. Participants explore their positive qualities and engage in art-making and creative writing.

How does being a part of IEATA impact your work in expressive arts?

IEATA has offered me a place of belonging. I have a community that supports me and where I can be of service. It has expanded my view of the field and the generosity of the expressive arts community. I find extremely valuable the monthly Forums and newsletters. I feel encouraged to be part of an inclusive and diverse organization.

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International Expressive Arts Therapy Association

P. O. Box 40707
San Francisco CA 94140-0707
Tel. +1 (415) 489.0698
info@ieata.org

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