



EGS – Alumni Masters Spotlight – Joana Fins Faria

Class of 2011

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Tell us about yourself! Where do you come from? Where are you living now?

38 years ago, I was born with eyes wide open in Portugal and a curiosity for the world around me. I used to sew as a child, photographed, was photographed and controlled my finances just like Donald Duck.

I graduated at the Faculty of Economics in Oporto and earned a specialization in Marketing at the Budapest University of Economic Sciences. In 2002 I grasped a project of International Marketing at CNET Networks in San Francisco and during my stay in the country of Uncle Sam managed to study design at two faculties: Berkeley and Academy Arts University. In 2003 I returned to Portugal to participate in a challenging job in the field of Interior Design. In 2009 to deepen my knowledge and to learn more about the psychology of the human being and his/her relationship with space I enrolled in the European Graduate School. I had in mind that I was going to learn about the impact of physical space on the human being as a whole but during this period I fell in love with the theme of autism. I began a process of therapy with an autistic adolescent and defended my thesis “Living Autism through Creative Writing”.

After some years moving around, studying, travelling and working I settled myself in Porto, close to the Atlantic seaside and the Douro river. It suits perfectly the early bird and her morning walks in the green city park in the heart of Porto. In the afternoon I stare at the sunshine in its many open lounges.

How did you discover the Expressive Arts and EGS?

Today I don't know if I discovered the Expressive Arts or the Expressive Arts discovered me. I am sure of one thing though – it was love at first sight. In Delhi, in Sri Aurobindo Ashram I had my first experience with the arts through a drawing labelled who am I. On my return to Portugal and following my urge to know more about the process that I unconsciously had started I came across the EGS online. I wrote an email and in a week I was in touch with its Dean Margo Fuchs and applying for my Master. Looking back I realize how fast and easy the process was: it was love at first sight.

What is your fondest memory of your experience in the Masters program? Or maybe two memories?

When Shaun McNiff came to EGS Summer school I studied and had a position as his assistant organizing a whole day workshop with painting for all the summer students in one single room. Mentally it was something that I had least imagined. Space was limited and we were more than 80 and painting is something that requires space. I remember that everybody was whispering during breakfast time how we were going to make it and I just had no clue.

With Shaun I learned to trust. Shaun says in his book “*Trust the Process*” and so I learned to trust. I assembled a table with all the art supplies that were needed - big white sheets of paper, glue, paints,

paintbrushes, foam, sellotape and paper. Shaun was playing a small drum with coins and they kept falling giving rise to a rather unconventional sound. The students kept coming in silence and settled in as they could. The walls began to be taken, the floor divided and we all managed a little space to paint to the sound of the drum. A strong collective like ritual took hold with coordinated pauses commanded by Shaun. He told us to walk around the room and we did and then returned to our work to continue it. I know that I finished that morning dancing in a human circle, in a collective human mass circle united through the arts. Reason was broken by the arts and humanism, physical proximity intertwined souls and hearts and the sharing was intense.

*“In between layers
we dance”*



Another exercise that my body remembers most was at the Expressive Arts Symposium in Lisbon, in the arts center of Gulbenkian, under the theme “And the ship sails on ...”.

We were the “movers” group, around 15 people from all around the world. Judith Greer Essex was leading the group, we were working with movement, exploring different speeds, too fast and too slow, enlarging and diminishing the movement. I remember I was laying down on the floor, making the movements of a fish coming out of the water, on the seaside shore, feeling the waves and the sand around. The composition of the fish mani-fested itself in an intensive connection with my body. It was so powerful and the decentering with the outside world was incredible. My movement was one of the selected ones of the group so I kept re-peating it for some time that it seemed to go on endlessly. Performing in front of a group made it even more intense. The presence of foreign eyes over me as witnesses generated a somehow overwhelming concentration on the movements, a looking in deeper into myself and into the feelings and ideas that came up and that were spread out later on paper. I felt more connected to that moment with each and every cell of my body and peace and grace were within

me. I experienced in my body the power of decentering and realized once you are connected with your body you embody your life as a whole.

Since finishing the program, what Expressive Arts work have you been doing?

I was the first with a Master of Expressive Arts from EGS in Portugal. Stepping on a new stone, feeling the responsibility of giving the first big step in barren land was quite challenging for me in the beginning. Nowadays I feel extremely comfortable working in private sessions in a clinic, organizing group workshops and developing projects of artistic and creative consultancy.

I allow the magic of the art to flow in a session as well as the so called “Earth Angels - spirits of everyday life calling for the return of our lost soul to the world”. Shaun McNiff refers to it by being present in the unholy land and inviting the client to play with whatever comes around, whether familiar or not and that is present in the room.

If you had a crystal ball, how would you imagine yourself in five years?

In 5 years’ time I see myself with a School of Expressive Arts in Porto, having my own atelier with a green garden and individuals setting their own schedule to express themselves through the arts. Workshops will be held and an amazing white gallery will display and interpret a collection of artifacts or works of art.

My mission in life is deeply linked to humanitarian causes, arts and healing. Somehow I feel that all of this will be provided in one single spot in the city, in a green park. It is crucial to construct a bridge between the aesthetics of the arts and the non aesthetics, and bridge creative and innovative exhibitions that appeal to a wide cross-section of the general public.

My crystal ball inside my heart is also saying that I will keep travelling a lot, returning to Switzerland for the CAGS program and will have a bright healing future with the arts which is soon to arise in sunny Portugal.



Anything else you want us to know?

Arts allow us to be fully present in the now, to enrich and connect with our inner self and forget the ego for sometime. In this NOW moment, we feel the full potential of life, we have space to limit and to fully BE.

With EXA, the beauty of things comes from the imperfection, impermanent, and incomplete. With EXA I learned to devote myself to the wabi-sabi, to the whole. I understood more my meditation times, the presence of the body in the temple, the connection with the chi of life ... to allow any form of expression available inside to be expressed safely cause judgment is the extension of the aesthetical beauty when in the EXA session ... keeping a fragile aesthetic ideology alive in any form of expression available.

EXA raises between the lines, matching intention to actuality. It's an attempt to grasp the totality, the holism, the connection with the sagrado and to make some sense of it for daily life ... like Sally Atkins told us about rituals, we can wash the face four times in morning, each time for the connection of the 4 rivers that are in the Appalachian Mountains and the 4 cardinal points.

Art for EXA is what we feel that makes sense for us and allows us to move forward, to draw a new path with a new movement, to take risks, make stuff and being awesome.