

San Alejandro, more creative in times of COVID-19

By: Giusette León García / CubaSí
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Lesmes Larrosa —visual artist and Principal of the San Alejandro School of Fine Arts— like most of Cubans, woke up last July 24 with a challenge: “Be more creative and explore a new alternative, perhaps not comprehensively studied before: the IT support.”

The decision to pause the school year in Cuba due to the pandemic had been announced the night before. Simultaneously, Cuba was fighting back COVID-19. Solutions thrived and ways were found to keep the teaching process alive. “The alliance among teachers, professors, family members, and board members of the Art Education system, sealed the new approach.”

The classroom, the workshop, everything turned to the virtual world: “The creation of a WhatsApp group for each major and school year where students exchanged viewpoints with their professors at home and the use of social networks like Facebook or Instagram played a

definitive role. Likewise, professors posted links on biographies and study guides among other useful documents for students. Then, professors checked all the work done by students while in quarantine.”

A pandemic has never a bright side. But it does teach valuable lessons and experiences that, despite everything, are worth the efforts. In the case of Art Education, and even though Professor Lesmes does not play in-person teaching down, he accepts that this situation has contributed to “achieve a greater independence in the studying and research processes of pupils, which is paramount for art students who must revise history and check sources to better understand society and the endless quest to find the truth and beauty, essential in the construction of a solid, human criterion in the face of the wide and varied range of information posted on the Internet on daily basis.”

On televised classes, which also included Art Education, the Principal stated: “All of us learned something. This was a process aimed at fostering integration and participation, especially if we take into consideration that not everyone has a cellphone these days at home. Thus, *Tele Rebelde*, a TV channel broadcasted nationwide, helped us a lot. Hence it was not necessary to own a decoding digital TV channel box to tune in to. This is a very inclusive example. None of our students was abandoned to their fate and all of them were satisfactorily checked by all professors.

Every adjustment to the schedule, as well as the necessary health conditions to guarantee resuming the school year and beginning of the 2020-2021 year, have been in the spotlight of art professors in Cuba. In the case of San Alejandro: “we got the sanitary certification last July 3rd by the Health Direction in the Municipality as we met every requirement to move forward to the recovery and working phase in the school, especially for the post Covid-19 phase. In this regard, both the San Alejandro and the National Art Schools, as well as the other 6 Visual Arts Schools nationwide, have the essential material resources to resume the school year.”

This Art School does not plan to reduce enrolment in any of its educational courses (Elementary Level, and both day-time and night-

time high school) for the upcoming school year. To maintain the physical distancing properly, we “have designed a gradual teaching schedule, which responds to group splitting by taking into account the physical features of the existing facilities and number of students. Certainly, every Specialized Workshop is absolutely respected. Even the school galleries were authorized to be used as classrooms as well as other facilities within the school. We have also designed gradual schedule for snacks and lunch in the school cafeteria where dining tables and chairs were separated,” the Principal pointed out.

The San Alejandro Art School has developed an agreed recruitment timetable for the Elementary Level, which perfectly fits in the current situation: “In the week October 12-16, we will be carrying out enrolments and recruitment exams; on October 19-23, we will implement exams for applicants and we are going to grant school course vacancies. From October 26-30, the school will release the results, all of these paired with a close attention to parents of those not selected. Everything is going to be part of the celebrations for Cuban Culture Day.”

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
