



## From Paducah to Jinju

The city of Paducah, Kentucky, lies in a rural region of the middle southern United States of America. Although the population is only about 25,000 people, there are many rich cultural traditions in craft and folk arts in the area. “Quilt City USA” as Paducah is lovingly known, is home to the National Quilt Museum, which offers inspiration and education for quilters. The confluence of the Ohio, Cumberland, Mississippi, and Tennessee Rivers create a hub for transportation, recreation, and exchange, that adds to the unique feel of the city.

Paducah has collaborated with Jinju, South Korea, in UNESCO Creative Cities events for the past two years, and I have personally had the honor of representing Paducah in Jinju. As an artist and arts administrator, I maintain my own studio practice which is predominantly focused on textiles and mixed media work, along with serving as the Executive Director of Yeiser





Art Center, which is a regional art center located in the heart of historic downtown Paducah. In an effort to share traditional art and craft practices with others, I make arts education a priority in my career, through outreach in schools and community events.

In the fall of 2021, I was invited to exhibit my textile work at the “Jinju Traditional Crafts Biennale.” This artwork was an exploration of improvisational quilt piecing using discarded denim and khaki work pants. It was an immense honor to be in the company of such accomplished artists, craftspeople, curators, and educators, especially while participating in the roundtable discussion with Fernando Zaccharia, Sonchat Changthawarang, and Professor Byung Hoon Jeong, the coordinator of the event. I connected with artisans from Korea, Benin, Italy, Thailand, Bulgaria, and Estonia. While I knew this trip to South Korea had the potential to be life-changing, I never would have guessed how much I would fall in love with the city of Jinju. I saw many similarities between the cities of Jinju and Paducah, like the history of traditional textiles, beautiful river views, extraordinary restaurants, and warm and welcoming residents.

When given the opportunity to travel to Jinju for a second time, for the Jinju World Folk Arts Biennale (JWFB) in fall of 2022, I excitedly initiated Paducah’s involvement. Along with serving as Executive Director of Yeiser Art Center, I also serve as the director of our region’s largest music and art festival, the Lower Town Arts & Music Festival (LTAMF). This festival is

held each spring in the historic Lower Town neighborhood of Paducah and welcomes approximately 20,000 visitors during the event. Our regional music is best represented by The Wheelhouse Rousters, a local group “sharing the sounds of the American inland waterways,” which made them the perfect musicians to represent us in Jinju. To round out their sound, LTAMF Music Director and cellist, Seth Murphy, joined us for the trip to South Korea. As our group traveled to and through Korea, I got to experience the wonder of the region for the second time in two years. Once in Jinju, there were many rehearsals in preparation for the Jinju World Folk Arts Biennale, but we still made time for sightseeing, exploring our new neighborhood, and experiencing local culture.

Highlights from our trip included the cross-cultural collaborations that happened through planned workshops, and also organically during practices and performances. New friendships were formed amongst people from Korea, Burkina Faso, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria, USA, and Egypt. Over shared meals and breathtaking performances we learned about each other’s cultures. We listened to music that brought tears to our eyes and together we explored the city of Jinju along with the surrounding area. Through the arts, we came to a deeper understanding that transcended the complication of not sharing a common language.





The exchange between UNESCO Creative Cities can be measured directly with things like number of collaborative events held together or total participants and communities affected. However, one could also use a more abstract measurement to decipher the effect the cities have had on one another. I have consciously and subconsciously carried the cultures of my new friends home with me. The art, music, and performances from events held in Jinju have now traveled home to many new countries, where they will be shared via social media, print publications, and in person. Recipes, languages, and research will now be linked to those special events that took place in Korea. Jinju has been successful in their goal of creating a platform for international exchange and has also fostered understanding and collaboration between countries. Jinju now lives in my heart and I strive to continue to learn about their arts and culture along with the other UNESCO Creative Cities that I have encountered as a result of Jinju's efforts.

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