

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2010-2011



Ken Moskowitz, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy, talking to the new group of Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

On June 18, 2010 the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission held a one-day pre-departure orientation for the Bulgarian Fulbright grantees who are to study, teach and live in the U.S. during the academic year 2010-11.

Recipients of grants for AY 2010-11 are 6 senior scholars, 7 graduate students, and one Hubert Humphrey fellow. Three young researchers have been awarded with the newly established Non-degree Grant for Doctoral Students.

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The Fulbright Commission expresses its gratitude to the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, the U.S. Fulbrighters in Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian Fulbright alumni for their participation, comments and practical advice.

We wish all grantees a very successful and rewarding experience in the U.S.

Senior Scholars

1. Christo Christov - *Chemistry*
2. Oleg Gochev - *Art (Mural Painting)*
3. Svetoslav Bobev - *Plant Pathology*
4. Alexander Kotsev - *Geography*
5. Iliya Iliev - *Ethnology*
6. Ognyan Kovachev - *Literary Theory*

Graduate Students

1. Nikolay Mihaylov - *Social Psychology*
2. Atanas Grozdev - *Sociology*
3. Gergana Tomova - *Political Science*
4. Rумыana Mihaylova - *Communications (Thanks to Scandinavia Scholarship)*
5. Irina Galabova - *Law*
6. Atanas Mihnev - *Business Administration (Fulbright-Oklahoma MBA Grant)*
7. Plamen Peshev - *Aerodynamics*

Non-Degree Grants for Doctoral Students

1. Angel Igov - *Literature*
2. Stanimira Krasteva - *Molecular Biology*
3. Radomir Todorov - *Finance*

Hubert Humphrey Fellowships

1. Hristo Ivanov - *Law*

Fulbright Office News

Final Nominations for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2011-12



Fulbright Interview, June, 2010. Members of the nomination committee (from left to right): Dr. Randall Baker, Dr. Julia Stefanova, PAO Ken Moskowitz

Collaborative Mural Pproject by Prof. Kong Ho



Dr. Kong Ho, Bulgarian students and professors, and members of the Fulbright Commission staff in front of a collaborative community mural painting at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia

On June 25, 2010, Prof. Kong Ho, Fulbright Senior Scholar to Bulgaria (AY 2009-2010) presented the first collaborative community mural painting at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. The project, supported by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, combines American and Bulgarian national symbols, as well as the efforts of Prof. Ho, his host Prof. Gochev and students from the department of mural painting.

2010 Fulbright Innovator Award

In May 2010 the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission received the Innovator Award recently established by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State “in recognition of outstanding innovation in designing and implementing the Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI).”



The award was conferred at the 28th conference of Executive Directors of Fulbright Commissions in Europe held in Berlin, May 8-12, 2010.

Book Launch



Fulbright alumnus and member of the Fulbright Commission Board Randall Baker presenting his books “Bulgariana” and “Why America isn’t Europe” at the Bulgarian Architects’ Club in Sofia

Fulbright Office News

Cultural Enrichment Activities for American Fulbright Grantees



Trip to Melnik and Rozhen Monastery, April 24, 2010

Fulbright Press Conference



On May 20, 2010, ED Dr. Julia Stefanova gave a press conference on the Fulbright International Summer Institute and other upcoming Fulbright events to representatives of eight different media.

NAFSA 2010 Annual Conference & Expo Kansas City, MO

The NAFSA 2010 Annual Conference The Changing Landscape of Global Higher Education was held in Kansas City, MO, on May 30 – June 4, 2010. Over 7,000 international educators from around the world discussed the most crucial topics in international education and exchange today, from study abroad and international student and scholar advising to global education trends and international education policy.

Salman Rushdie, one of the most celebrated and controversial fiction writers of our day, a powerful advocate for human rights and artistic freedom and Sheryl WuDunn, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist and Business Executive, were among the plenary speakers.

A major highlight of the conference was the International Education Expo Hall, which featured exhibitors representing more than 400 organizations from around the world, including colleges and universities, study abroad and intensive-English programs, embassies, government agencies, and more.

Program Officer Maria Kostova presented Bulgaria at

the EducationUSA Pavilion in the International Exposition and at the EducationUSA Country Fair with a special stand, visited by over 150 participants.



Program officer Maria Kostova at the EducationUSA Country Fair

Fulbright Office News

2010 Young Talent Awards



ED Julia Stefanova and the two winners of "Young Talent" National Competition organized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth, and supported by the Fulbright Commission

FULBRIGHT INTERNATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE 2010

August 9-21, Tryavna, Bulgaria

The Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) is an academic and cultural program created by the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission in 2002. FISI offers one- or two-week intensive courses in a wide variety of subject areas. All courses are taught in English by distinguished professors from the U.S., Europe and Bulgaria, and are addressed to undergraduate and graduate students, university faculty and professionals. This year FISI is scheduled to take place from August 9 to August 21 in Bansko. Prospective participants have the unique opportunity to make their own selection of courses. A tentative program with brief course descriptions and biographical notes for the lecturers is posted on FISI website (www.fisi-bg.info). Applicants can choose between the following courses:

Business, Economics, Finance

Course 01: International Investing: Opportunities and Risks

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Chenchu Bathala, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH, USA

Course 02: Negotiation and Conflict Resolution

Lecturer: Prof. George Siedel, University of Michigan, Ross School of Business, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Course 03: Investment and Portfolio Management

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Miroslav Mateev, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Course 04: How to Start a Small Business

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. William Heath, Graceland University, IA, USA

Course 05: Financial Modeling With Microsoft Excel

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Carmelo Giaccotto, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA

Course 06: Large Investments and International Project Finance

Lecturer: Dr. Philipp Uhlmann, Bentley University, Waltham, MA, USA

Political Science, History, Philosophy

Course 07: Perspectives on Public Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Charles Gliozzo, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

Course 08: Decision-Making and Foreign Policy: Southeast Europe in the Trans-Atlantic Relations

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dinko Dinkov, University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria

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Course 09: Development Struggles in a Globalized World: The Political Economy of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East

Lecturer: Dr. Ivani Vassoler-Froelich, State University of New York, Fredonia, NY, USA

Course 10: South-Eastern Europe: Relations with the European Union and Beyond

Lecturer: Marco Ranieri, Dialogue Europe Centre, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

Course 11: American Foreign Policy and the International System in the Era of Globalization

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Mark Kramer, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Course 12: Freedom of Speech

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Paul Newman, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA

Course 13: The Times They Are a-Changing: American Society from McCarthy to Nixon

Lecturer: Dr. Pierangelo Castagneto, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Course 14: Peace and Conflict Resolution in the 21st Century

Lecturer: Dr. Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Course 15: Logic in the Continental Tradition

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Gungov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

Course 16: Seeing Films Philosophically

Lecturer: Dr. Costica Bradatan, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, USA

Course 17: American Pragmatism and Semiotics

Lecturer: Prof. Dr. Ivan Mladenov, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria

Course 18: Technology of Imagination

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kristian Bankov, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

Course 19: The Philosophical Issues of the XXI Century (in Bulgarian)

Lecturers: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lidia Denkova and Prof. Dr. Hristo Todorov, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

Law

Course 20: D.A.R.E. --- Debate. Argue. Reason. Examine.

Lecturer: David M. Korn, Phelps Dunbar LLP, New Orleans, LA

Course 21: Protection of Human Rights in the Council of Europe

Lecturer: Dr. Maria Zhurnalova-Juppunov, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Social Studies, Communications, Media

Course 22: International Development Assistance

Lecturer: Boyko Todorov, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Course 23: Managing Communal Conflict: Identity and Integrative Development

Lecturer: Dr. David Jones, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN, USA

Course 24: International Career Planning in a Globalized Economy

Lecturer: Dr. Gary L. Schnellert, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND, USA

Course 25: Environmental Sustainability for Society

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. James E. Hollenbeck, Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN, USA

Course 26: Gender in International Contexts: Competence Skills for Global Success

Lecturers: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Noemi Marin, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA

Course 27: The Art of Family Life

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roumen Bostandjiev, Burgas Free University, Burgas, Bulgaria

Course 28: Public Relations: It Can Make or Break an Organization

Lecturer: Prof. Dan Fellner, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

Course 29: Projects Writing and Projects Management

Lecturer: Danail Danov, Communications and Human Resources Development Center, Sofia, Bulgaria

Course 30: The Art of Travel Writing: Journalism, Critique and Analysis

Lecturer: Dr. David Pickus, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA

Cultural Studies, Art

Course 31: The Art of Seeing: Honing an Artistic Vision; Capturing an Idea with a Click

Lecturer: Martha Grenon, Freelance Photographer and Graphic Designer, Austin, TX, USA

Course 32: What is Hip? The Digital Storytelling of Current Pop Art and Culture trends in New York City

Lecturer: Prof. Michelle Hill, Parsons The New School for Design, New York, NY, USA

Course 33: Words and Worlds of Thinking and Art

Lecturer: Prof. Milka Hadjikoteva, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

Course 34: Surviving & Thriving in the Global Economy: Understanding & Using Cultural Symbols & Practices to Improve Communications, Products, Marketing, Sales, & Service

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phyllis Miller, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS, USA

Course 35: Introduction to Christian Orthodoxy: History, Theology, Symbolism as "Orthodox" Way of Life

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Serguey Ivanov, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Course 36: Byzantine Art and Architecture in South-Eastern Europe

Lecturer: Dr. Clemena Antonova-Crombois, Royal Academy of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium

Bulgarian Studies

Course 37: Bulgarian Folk Music

Lecturer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hristo Krotev, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Course 38: Introduction to Bulgarian Culture (history, politics, economy, folklore, art and culture)

Lecturers: Team

If you want to participate in this event, please visit www.fisi-bg.info for practical information and application forms. You can also obtain general information from: Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange, 17, Alexander Stamboliiski Blvd.; Sofia 1000, Bulgaria, Tel.: +359 2 980 82 12; E-mail: rkaneva@fulbright.bg

To Chicago and Back

Beyond the Matrix

Petya Osenova is associate professor in computer linguistics at the Department of Bulgarian Language at Sofia University. She has published two books on HPSG (Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar) description of Bulgarian data. As a Fulbright visiting scholar in AY 2009-2010, Dr. Osenova conducted research at the Center for the Study of Language and Information of Stanford University.

Although I came to Stanford in late January (the rainy season), North California seemed to me (and still seems) an exotic place – lemons, oranges, palm trees, beautiful flowers of all colors and everywhere. Now, when the spring is here, the world outside is even more wonderful. All this serene nature lives in harmony with the whistles of the Caltrain, the buzz of the planes, and the indistinguishable noise of the car engines. I have traveled a lot around Europe during the last 10 years. I used to compare Eastern Europe with Western countries, South countries to Northern ones. But I can say (as many others before me) that the USA is really different from Europe. In what respects – I am discovering step by step.

Palo Alto, where I live now, is the closest place to Stanford. It is a quiet and green residential area with unique houses and magic gardens and patios, with churches of self-realization and small hotels. Whenever I take my 15 minutes route home via California Avenue, I always feel like an Alice in the Wonderland... just the proportions are as they should be.

Palo Alto is an ecology-oriented place. It recycles paper, glass and compost. Although I experienced this way of living in Germany, it took me some time to learn again what is appropriate for which bin.

Stanford University provides free shuttles to Palo Alto and inside the campus. First time, when I got on the C-line Margueritte bus, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that the driver and the passengers greeted each other with 'Good morning, how are you?' and then parted with 'Bye, have a nice day! Thank you!' I am still enjoying very much this friendly atmosphere, which makes your day special. Each day!

I noticed that the services here are very good – it is a pleasure to go shopping, to get your hair cut, to have a coffee at Star Buck's. People are friendly and helpful. However, I also noticed that people prefer the texting and emailing to real live communication. Internet is everywhere – of course, in first place to facilitate your life, when you pay something or check some details. However, it also keeps you distant from the people in many other cases. I have the feeling that people here have very carefully designed day routines, which they strictly follow. Whatever happens, they continue on their own track. I even do not know whether this is a good thing, or a bad thing, but this is different from Bulgaria, where our life seems much more flexible in many respects. I realize that this impression might be also connected to the fact that I am a newcomer in this area, and a lot of things for some time might be hidden or even not accessible to me.

What I really like here, however, is the community life. Neighbors



are watchful and reliable, people express openly their opinions, and have their battles when necessary to defend their rights. For example, they defend their green spaces when some new construction work comes in the way. I also see a very active life in the churches. It is nice to observe that the church has its role in the community – to see people coming and going not only for masses, to hear them laughing or talking to each other. I must say I miss such a community life in Bulgarian orthodox churches.

The University of Stanford is a majestic place. With the mixture of old magnificent and new modern buildings, with its legendary palm trees, with its large open green spaces. It is interesting to know that palm trees are not domestic. They are imported mostly from the Canary Islands. The existence of Stanford is connected to a sad family story. The Stanfords were one of the families, who built the railways in the USA. But their son died in his teenage age, so the parents decided to build this University. For that reason, there are memorial plates on the buildings saying that this building, for example, was erected by the mother in such-and-such year. The university keeps and respects its history.

Stanford has many faces – it depends on you which one(s) you would like to pick. It can show its serenity, its hospitality, its busy life, its very international atmosphere. This is the perfect place for balancing your studies with doing sports. The typical scene at Stanford and the vicinity is the bikers and the joggers. It is especially nice to see the twinkling lights of the bike catseyes in the evening, or a young mother jogging with a baby-carriage during the day. Stanford is also a cultural center – there are ongoing events all the time – public lectures, concerts, various initiatives. The libraries are like museums – vast, quiet and rich in books. As a linguist, I visit the Green Library, which has a special desk for visitor orientation and helpful guidelines on the organization of the repositories.

The food is very international, which is expected in California, which attracts various cultures. The Stanford cafes suggest Mexican, Thai, Chinese, Italian varieties in addition to the traditional burgers. For my taste, the food in general is a bit too spicy, but always delicious and different.

My office is in Cordura hall – a cozy two-floor building, which hosts several labs. I can see squirrels and birds in trees opposite my window. Here I am visiting the CSLI institute, and more precisely – LINGO group, which has been working on large-scale language grammar engineering. The people from the core group are now working actually in many other places in the world. They are at Washington University, in UK, Germany, Norway etc. There exists, however, the so-called Matrix grammar, which plays the role of a common typological template for writing grammars in different languages. For the moment, very well developed grammars exist for English, German, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, Modern Greek, and more are underway for other languages, such as Korean, Thai etc. I feel just like the personages in the Matrix movie – a parallel world, which you have to win, in order to make your own world better.

I am really lucky to closely collaborate with the developer of the English resource grammar, who is a very experienced and cooperative specialist. Our common goal is to develop an initial resource grammar for Bulgarian in a certain unification-based formalism. I do not know the formalism very well, he does not know Bulgarian at all – thus, gradually I start learning the ideology of encoding the linguistic knowledge, while

he starts to know more about Bulgarian, and also about the challenges it poses for the computational processing. For example, Bulgarian is a highly inflective language. When the verb morphology was converted into rules, it consisted of more than 2600 rules altogether.

The challenge for the grammar writer is that he has to work at all linguistic levels – morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics. He has to balance the lexical information in the lexicon entries with the morphological inflectional rules, syntactic behaviour and semantic representations of the sentences. This complexity is justified by the fact that such a grammar would not only be able to analyze texts, but also to generate texts. The envisaged applications are numerous - Machine Translation, Information Retrieval, Education, Cross-Linguistic studies, among others. For example, my collaborator has provided the English grammar and its maintenance toolkit for learning purposes in some high schools here in the USA. I also hope one day to see the Bulgarian grammar used in such important contexts.

Since I am working with a toy grammar, my lexicon is rather small. Thus, it happens for me to syntactically check sentences like: The old happy window chases Brown in the garden. It is fun!

Since I have been here for only two months now, I expect to discover more in the world of elaborating the Matrix grammar into a Bulgarian one as well as in the world of Bay area life.

Disclaimer: The text is published in its original and unedited version.

Dimitar Kaldamukov

Fulbright graduate student, Law

George Washington University Law School, Washington, D.C.

AY 2009-2010

Fulbright and my experience in the U.S.

When I found out that I have been chosen as a Fulbright grantee for the 2009-2010 academic season I knew that I have done something big. However, looking back now, I think that I did not quite well understand what I was going into. Fulbright turned out to be a blast. A once life experience. In this essay I will try to summarize all these things that really impressed me in US. I will “try” because I feel like I can speak one week for the experience that I have had so far here. All the people, all the places, all the little details that can change one’s view to life. In general I can honestly say that for this one year I will learn more about my Bulgarian society and more about our, Bulgarian, legal system, (I am a Masters of Laws students in George Washington University) than I could have learned back at home.

I was thinking how I should write an essay about my experience here. It is so rich and so...different that I have even difficulty to talk about all my impressions. And then I just decided to say all this that amazed me and surprised me most.

Hospitality and help

Many people (so I have heard) say that Americans are individualist. That this is the reason (they claim) why US does not have very good (I do not



know what does it mean) social policy towards its workers, unemployed and so on. From my experience Americans are the most hospitable people that I have ever met. Let me just tell you 3 short stories:

Story No.1.

A friend of mine and I are walking along a road on our way to the immigration office where we should have our Social Security Numbers cards issued. We are dressed in short khakis and T-shirts. Weather in DC is particu-

larly humid in the summer so we are both sweating. Suddenly (it is very typical for the summers in DC) a rain started to pour. A heavy summer storm. We got drenched in few seconds. As suddenly as it has started so the rain stopped after 5 minutes. However it was enough that we got completely wet, the path along the road that we were walking on got muddy and on top of it we became visibly dirty. So, imagine us walking there, muddy, drenched, two strangers on the road. At this moment a car pull out, a lady came out and just asked us: “Hey, guys I see you are wet, do you want me to give you a ride to the nearest town?” Of, course we accepted, since we were actually heading at this place. It turned out that in the car this lady is alone with her 2 small children.

And this moment just struck me. I just could not figure out how a lonely mother with her 2 children can just pick up two complete strangers, drenched and muddy. She left us, said "Good buy" and left with her car. But all this day I was thinking of her help.

Story No.2.

This winter was particularly special for DC because they indicated some snow records. DC was hit by 2 or 3 blizzards and in the period of 2 months DC broke its 100 years record for snow fall. For a week in February the town was closed. No public transport, Federal Government was off, nobody was working. The streets were empty. Even Starbuck was closed.

So one of these days in the middle of the storm I decided to go out and make some pictures so that I have this historical moment documented. I went in the downtown and started taking pictures. Besides me there were few tourists there who were brave enough to risk it outside. So since there was no transport I had to walk through the snow from street to street and make my pictures. Few cars (maybe 1 car per 5 minutes) were passing by. But at least half of the cars that passed by me while I was outside, stopped and asked me did I need help and could they drive me to somewhere. Maybe I looked particularly desperate (my face was almost frozen and I had snow flakes on my eyebrows and beard) but still it astonished me how all these people were ready to help me and the practicality of their readiness.

Story No.3

Thanksgiving night. All Americans are with their families and friends. I did not expect that I would feel lonely at this night (I was not particularly sure what is Thanksgiving and how do the Americans celebrate) but I felt. Especially when all my American friends went with their families and when one sees the happy and warm preparation for the night by everybody.

However the previous week one of my professors (he is 38 so do not think that he did out of loneliness) sent emails to all international students in his class. He basically said: "Guys, I know you going to be alone tonight, far away from your families, so I just want to invite everyone at my place and we can have a dinner together." He has also invited some of his friends. About 7-8 of us went.

And I have to admit that this guy and his girlfriend just made the night for us. They have prepared thousands of dishes, bought wines and sweets and we had amazing talk about everything. From politics to sport. All of us – the international students – just felt like at home. We had a great night.

So because of this and because of many other examples that I have had here I just think that in general all my experience shows that Americans are warm, tolerable and hospitable people. They are willing to help when they can. They even feel this is as their social responsibility. Maybe it is an inheritance from their past – after all US has been found on the premise of social tolerance and equality. A place where everybody can succeed and deserves the chance to try. I do not know. But the mass perception that Americans are individualists and do not care about anybody else is just a myth. Yes, they protect their personal space fiercely, they do not kiss each other on the cheek, they do not stay in the cafes at least 1 hour per day but still when they can, they help you. This willingness to help is one of the features that I really admire and respect in the Americans.

Fulbright

Fulbright is a more than a scholarship. Actually the scholarship is just the visible and material side of it. The side that a non-Fulbrighter

does not see is a very, very well connected society which I dare to say is consisted of mainly bright people.

The Fulbright chapter in DC is extremely active. We have meetings, dinners and events almost every week. I managed to meet people from all over the world and we all share the Fulbright experience. At this moment I am positive that I will try to attend all Fulbright meetings and events when I get back to Europe. The opportunities between fellow Fulbrighters are just great. We share information about jobs, events. Right now I have a fellow Fulbrighter in almost every country and if I need help wherever I am in the world I think Fulbright will help me tremendously. I still remember one of the events here in DC where I met a very interesting couple from Australia. They were in their 60s and it turned out that the husband did his Fulbright grant in the 70s while his wife in the early 80s. And I was thinking how the Fulbright experience could not only get together completely strangers but even people from such a different generations.

One of the great opportunities which Fulbright foundation offers is their annual seminar for all Fulbrighters in US. Mine (there are several around US) was in Philadelphia and I had a great time. I met some of the most interesting people I have ever met in my life. The chance is that you do not meet only legal scholars (as me) but people from every professional sphere in life. I really have the feeling that I am part of the Fulbright family. I am using this title with honor and to be honest when I go back I hope to prove that Fulbright Commission in Bulgaria did not make a wrong choice when gave me the scholarship.

Connections between cultures

The premise and the initial idea of the Fulbright program is that you as a Fulbrighter are a messenger of your country in US. When you go home you have to take your experience and your knowledge and bring as much as you can from it to your fellow countrymen.

In October I was honored to speak at the Dean's dinner here in George Washington University Law School. I was wondering what I can tell to all these people that have seen most of the things in life and then I decided that I can just speak about my role in US thanks to Fulbright. My speech was based on the idea that being in US I am playing the role of a bridge between the Bulgarian society and the American society. People who have never been to the Balkans know (in general) only few things about my region – probably that we started the WWI, that we have always conflicts and that if anything bad happens in Europe it usually comes from the Balkans. So my mission is to bring another message. To send other signal. That people from the Balkans work hard and generally are not so different than people anywhere in the world. However my role is twofold. Because at the same time I also have to bring to the people back home the understanding that American society have the same goals as the Bulgarian society – to live peaceful and free life. Actually this chance has been given to me by Fulbright foundation. It gives this chance to students all over the world every year. And I think this is the most feasible way that we, people on this Earth, can live in peace and harmony. Through understanding each other. You have to understand how people live. On the spot. You have to be there. Fulbright gives this chance. They make the connections possible.

That is why I think that my being here is a connection between cultures.

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Out of America

Explore Bulgarian Culture Through the Arts and Mural Art Teaching

Dr. Kong Ho utilizes his bicultural background as a teaching artist professionally trained in both Chinese and Western painting to teach as associate professor of art and interdisciplinary arts program director at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, Pennsylvania, since 2001. Ho has received a VSA arts Teaching Artist Fellowship (2008-09), Hong Kong Baptist University Fellowship (2006), and Sasakawa Fellowship (2005). As a Fulbright senior scholar in Bulgaria in AY 2009-2010, he taught mural painting at the National Academy of Art in Sofia for 5 months.

As an Asian-American, it is an advantage to understand the rich Bulgarian culture in its unique geographic location between Asian and European continents. When I participated a week-long Fulbright International Summer Institute in Tryavna last August, I had realized that there was a part of Bulgarian history related to Chinese Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). The famous Genghis Khan, the Mongol Empire ruler and Chinese emperor of Yuan dynasty, conquered most of Eurasia including China, Korea, the Caucasus, Central Asia, substantial portions of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. I am interested to know more about Khan because my first name "Kong" is pronounced similar to "Khan." However, these two homonyms have different meaning in Chinese. "Khan" means ruler of desert, while "Kong" stands for running river. After reading *The Insider's Guide to Sofia & Beyond* (Milner and Sanatani), the gift from the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, I understand more about the Bulgarian Khans who started invasions from the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia and established themselves in most areas of Central Asia. The last Khan was Boris I (852-889) and he converted to Christianity in 861 and declared himself as Tsar which means Caesar under the Roman tradition.

In cold February 1, 2010, I returned to Bulgaria to teach mural painting at the National Academy of Art in Sofia for my 5-month Fulbright US Scholar program. My Fulbright fellowship allowed me to have the opportunity to explore Bulgarian art and mural painting curriculum in higher education setting through practical engagement in teaching mural painting with Bulgarian students. In the first month, I spent most of my days adjusting myself in Sofia, a modern urban setting of Bulgaria which was quite different from Tryavna, a town of tourist attraction because of its cultural, historical and architectural reservation. In comparison with my university-based small town, Bradford, in a deep wood of Allegany National Forest of Pennsylvania, Sofia was much more interesting city to me, just like my second home town, Hong Kong, a metropolitan city. The Neoclassical architectures, such as Alexander Nevski Cathedral, St. Nedelya Church, Sofia University and National Gallery for Foreign Art, National Art Gallery, National Natural Science Museum, and Cyril and Methodius National Library, were just around the blocks of the National Academy of Art in Sofia.



Dr. Kong Ho and Prof. Oleg Gotchev, department head of mural painting, National Academy of Art, Sofia

I thought I would take advantage of the first two weeks in visiting those famous attractions and touring the city center before my spring semester started in the middle of February. However, Mother Nature had another plan for me. I landed in Sofia with two suitcases plus a ton of snow as gift from the Mother Nature. I should know the "sign" from my not-too-smooth flight from Washington DC to Munich in February 1st. My flight was delay due to the medical emergency detour to Iceland in the middle of the journey. One of the passengers had a heart attack in our flight and it was a lift-and-death situation, so our United Airlines pilot had made a humanistic decision in landing in Iceland for sending this passenger to the most close-by hospital. I and most of the flight passengers were really proud of this United Airlines pilot for his decision in saving this person's life, even some of us had to reschedule our missing flights to other destinations rather than Munich. So I arrived in Sofia in already dark evening, six hours late, but I was lucky that Maria Kostova, program officer of Fulbright Commission, was aware of my delay flights. She greeted me at the airport and helped me in traveling to my rental apartment. During the taxi ride, I realized that heavy snow was everywhere in Sofia. It was a cultural shock to me that people in Bulgaria didn't shovel the snow on the sidewalk but let it turn to ice overnight. It might be fine to people without disabilities, but it was hard for me in walking around my apartment blocks to find food in the second day after my arrival.

I told myself that new environment generated new experience and different countries had diverse cultures. Using natural energy, like sun

and frequent walking over by pedestrians, to melt the snow and ice might be an economical and nonpolluting solution to the city environment. After I finished all the business in opening a new bank account, getting a SIM chip for my cell phone, and basic survival grocery shopping in the second day, I stayed in my 35 sq. m or 376 sq. ft. efficient apartment for the most of time in the first two weeks. The Internet connection was broken in the first weekend as well as the local phone connection because of the language barrier. I didn't know the payment for the SIM chip which only provided two local phone calls. So I was totally left alone without access to contact anyone for four days. However, it might be good in a certain way because I could really concentrate on finishing my Philadelphia mural design layout which I brought with me as one of my unfinished homework from America as well as preparing my American mural art movement presentations for my teaching. Also, my bicultural background helped me in adapting myself in small space. I used to live in a small apartment in Hong Kong, so I learnt how to be flexible in using the space in my studio apartment. I used one of the wall next to my bed as my easel to hang up the mural layout canvas with masking tape which wouldn't damage the wall surface. Then I completed my first art project in my new "studio" apartment in Sofia which I shown it to my mural painting class students in the first day of class. We also took a group photo around this mural layout at the end of the class.



Mural painting class

Teaching Bulgarian undergraduate students with mural painting as their majors was different from teaching the general education designated mural design course at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. All attended Bulgarian students expressed enthusiasm in studying American mural art. From my past teaching experience, I understood the main reason of some American college students signed up my mural design class was to fulfill their general education requirement in our liberal art college. They might not have any art background or interest in art at all. Prof. Oleg Gotchev, department head of mural painting, introduced me to all the sophomores who originally signed up for Prof. Roujko Cheleblev's mural painting class. It was because of the Fulbright Program, so the department had scheduled my course with Prof. Cheleblev's students. Prof. Cheleblev, a French-Bulgarian, invited a student translator for my first class presentation of my mural paintings in the United States. I knew most of students could understand English which they learnt from watching American movies and television episodes. It might be me who

required the translation of the Bulgarian introduction by Prof. Gotchev to the students. I felt welcome in this first class meeting and my first presentation was well-received. Later, I posted our group photo on my Facebook to share it with my friends and students in the United States and Hong Kong. Some of my former students were curious to know how Bulgarian art students dress up for class. Some were interested to find out how they think of collaborative art course.

It might be the first inclusive and collaborative mural painting course offered in the National Academy of Art since most of their students were well-trained in mural painting and they could handle individual mural painting project all by themselves without working with others. However, my mural painting course objectives emphasized collective design idea development, collaborative painting execution, and constructivist learning experience. It might be a challenge for independent Bulgarian art students in figuring out a collective theme for this mural project. The proposed mural site was located at the north building of the National Academy of Art. However, it was one of my duties as US Fulbrighter to foster learning, exchange, and empathy between cultures.

After the first three classes of introduction to American mural art movement and discussion of major theme for our mural project, we all agreed that the theme of this mural would be about the Bulgarian and American cultures with emphasis on the arts. I applied my past teaching experience in using online discussion feature of the "Blackboard", an online comprehensive teaching and learning platform used by the University of Pittsburg, in setting up a social network discussing forum at the Gmail blog. This online discussing forum was executively design for the students enrolled in this class to engaging in after-class discussion, ideas sharing, and promoting individual accountability in this collaborative art project. Through this online blog communication, I posted more information related to American mural art history, mural organizations, mural painting programs in the United States colleges and universities, mural art supplies venders, and outstanding American muralists. These supplementary information were welcomed by my Bulgarian students who found them very useful and practical for their studies. At the same time, I posted more instructions, guidelines, and assignments for them to direct their focuses in mural ideas discussion and research, time management, and organizing their thoughts through writing blog journals and adding comments to discussion posts. This online discussion forum might be a new channel to them for this liberal and collective mural design, but it was proved to be an effective way to promote mutual understanding and respect between professor and students. Also, I believed that our dialogues on this online blog discussion really helped to close the gap between art teaching and learning, and to promote mutual understanding.

I knew it might take more time for my Bulgarian students to get used to this online discussion forum because of the language barrier in written English. However, it might take less time for them to become familiar with my Chinese and British colonial English accent. The huge barrier to me or other visitors was the Bulgarian spoken language, Slavonic language, and the Cyrillic alphabet in particular. I realized that all the street and building signs in Tryavna and even Sofia were only in Cyrillic language. I thought it would be the same for the rest parts of Bulgaria. From the artistic viewpoint, the Cyrillic alphabet, one of the most widely used alphabets in the world, was very unique in letter form and symmetrical structure. The Cyrillic letters might look like Roman or Latin letters but the pronunciations were very different. Similarly, the "yes" and "no" body language in Bulgaria was opposite to most foreign customs. In Bulgaria, nodding head up and down meant "no" while turning head left and right suggested "yes."



Alexander Nevski Cathedral

I had experienced this opposite Bulgarian body language when I asked for direction to the Alexander Nevski Cathedral from the people I met on the street. It was a sunny Saturday of the first weekend of March and it was still cold and windy. The day time temperature on that day was about 35° to 39°F or 2° to 4°C. I geared up myself with my winter coat, scarf, gloves and hat before I left my studio apartment. I took a half hour walk to reach the spectacular St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral. With the blue sky as the backdrop, this neo-Byzantine style Russian cathedral with gold-plated domes and greenish oxidized bronze cupolas stood out from other comparative classical architectures in that area. I took the first picture in Bulgaria was the night scene of this Orthodox cathedral when Prof. Gotchev and I had a dinner at the National Academy of Art restaurant next to this cathedral in the forth day of my arrival. I was attracted to this cathedral not only the magnificent external architectonic structure, but also the splendid stained glass windows, Venetian mosaics and striking murals inside this cathedral. After I soaked up all the outside space and colorful mosaics on each entrance doors of this cathedral, I entered the church through the while Carrara marble main entrance to explore the dramatic interior atmosphere.

I was amazed in finding almost the entire interior walls, columns, ceiling space were covered with Orthodox murals depicting Gospel interpretations of Jesus Christ's life and teaching with other significant figures like Virgin Mary, 12 disciples and Saints, painted by some of Russia and Bulgaria's best artists of the time. The interior lighting was a little dim, especially when I entered from a bright sunny outdoor space. I thought it was also for the purpose of preserving this national treasure from artificial light. Among all the murals, I was drawn to the mural, titled "Jesus Christ at Age 12 among Scribes and Pharisees" by Iv. Murkvichka, by the suspicious looks of the Scribes and Pharisees upon the young Jesus figure in the mural. I could still imagine the colorful costumes and detail expressions of individual figures in this mural under the original context.

Besides murals, I found the most interior space were decorated with Italian marble in sienna, Prussian green, white Carrara, as well as other luxurious materials, like onyx and alabaster columns on the thrones. All these golden framed murals, decorative marble textures, colorful light beams coming through the stained glass windows, and 45 m or 147 ft. high ceiling space added to the richness of this remarkable cross-domed basilica.



National Academy of Art

On my way out, I found the entrance of The Crypt, Bulgarian icons museum, a part of the National Art Gallery, on the left side of the main entrance. After walking down the marble stairs, I was overwhelmed by the huge collection of Eastern Orthodox icons or medieval Christian iconographic paintings kept inside this underground vault beneath the cathedral. This icons museum was well-lighted in comparison with the above cathedral and I could inspect the details of individual icon paintings which usually were not large in size. I was surprised in seeing the rich colors and textures from these well-preserved icon paintings which were mainly painted on wood panels inlaid with gold leaf. The common iconic types were Christ, Mary, with or without the infant Christ, Saints, and other narrative paintings of lives of Christ, Mary, popular Saints and Angels. I was astonished in finding out there were so many diverse interpretations of the common iconic types.

My head was filled with all these illuminated golden icon images when I stepped out the crypt. The sky was still clear blue with a little warm tone cast by the late afternoon sunset. I wandered around the open space in front of the cathedral and was drawn to sparkling light reflected from the adjacent small flea market selling handmade lattices, antiques, and



National Art Gallery

hand painted Christian icons inlaid with gold leaf. I captured the warm spring sunset beams reflected on those illuminated icons displayed along the sidewalk with my camera and ended my first day tour of Bulgarian famous landmark. I told myself that there was still a lot to see in this city center of Sofia and it would be for my second day journey.

Another sunny day with gorgeous blue sky when I left my apartment walking towards the first museum, National Gallery for Foreign Art, next to the National Academy of Art. The high contrast of black Baroque-style roof with white marble columns, statues, and wall aroused people's attention to this Neoclassical architecture. The name of this museum had already suggested the Bulgarian perspective in understanding foreign art and culture. Out of my expectation, I was surprised by its unique collection of Christian sculptures of the Goa, an Indian province, as well as Indian miniature paintings, Hindu sculptures, Buddhist artifacts, Japanese ukiyo-e prints, African wood sculptures, and European paintings and sculptures from 15th to 20th-century. Through the cross-cultural collection in this museum, visitors were amazed to find the Eurasian influence on intellectual, cultural, artistic, and social life in Bulgaria, the passage between Asia and Europe.

I had taught Japanese art appreciation with special focus on ukiyo-e prints, in the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. However, it was my second time in reviewing the original ukiyo-e prints so close but the first time in appreciating the original ukiyo-e prints of Hokusai Katsushika's *The Great Wave Off Kanaqawa*, and *The Red Mt. Fuji*. The feeling in perceiving some famous prints or teaching images, which I had used to teach rhythm and texture in my art and design classes, was hard to describe in words. It looked like I had finally encountered my old friends of distant lands.

The familiar Buddhist statues I saw in this museum recalled my memory of my last research travel to the distant land of Mogao Grottoes near Dunhuang, China, an oasis located in a religious, cultural, and intellectual influence crossroads on the famous Silk Road, connected both ancient Eastern and Western civilizations. I was particularly interested in Buddhist artifacts not only its significant influence to my recent studio-based research in spiritual paintings, but also its intriguing iconographic symbols, similar to the medieval Christian iconographic paintings which I saw in The Crypt the day before.

Following the Tsar Osvoboditel Boulevard, The National Art Gallery was easily reached on foot in a sunny day from the National Gallery for Foreign Art. This former splendid royal Tsar's Palace combined Châteauesque and Viennese Neo-Baroque styles, located on Alexander Battenberg Square, had become nowadays home to the National Art Gallery and the Ethnographic Museum. The National Art Gallery collected and exhibited works by Bulgarian national artists, foreign art and first-generation Bulgarian painters after the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878. There were two outstanding photography exhibitions, "Pencho Balkanski Photography" and "Pictures Year of Bulgaria: 2009" sponsored by Canon, also held coincidentally by this museum when I visited that Sunday. I was especially drawn to the impressive black and white photos with artistic brushstroke effect technique of Pencho Balkanski, an original early

20th-century Bulgarian photographer. This exhibition, titled "Pencho Balkanski - On the Trail of His 1936 Vienna Exhibition," showcased the innovative and emphatic portrait photos with German expressionist woodcut-like quality looks. I admired most was the one titled "Portrait of a Girl," used for the exhibition poster and brochure covers. The short dark hair and exaggerated long neck plus a symmetrical composition with low-key tonal effect added the timeless atmosphere of this photo.

If the collection of the National Art Gallery highlighted the artistic heritage of Bulgarian art, then the Sofia Art Gallery, opposite to the National Art Gallery in the Alexander Battenberg Square, showcased the Bulgarian art developments in a modern way. It became a center for contemporary Bulgarian art because it was focus on presenting contemporary art and work done by young Bulgarian artists. I was especially fascinated by the artistic and spiritual work of Peter Dochev. His latest paintings moved apart from his previous industrial figurative theme to relief structural abstraction. The integrity of his work was attributed not only to his artistic talent and quests, but also to his personal values and belief in free artistic expression. His dark grey metallic high relief structural paintings gave me the impression of the spectacular aerial view of our overdeveloped city in a dark night. I could feel the freely air above in contrast to the overcrowded city below from his work.



Ivan Vazov National Theater

When I left the gallery, I could see several bright stars hanging on a late evening dark purple-blue sky between the still bare twigs of the trees in the square park. I could feel the early March night chill in the air. Before I caught a taxi back to my studio apartment, I was attracted to the shining lights reflected from the façade of the most ornate building in Sofia, Ivan Vazov National Theatre, a Neoclassical architecture with a large pediment supported by six white marble columns, depicting Apollo and the muses in gold and white. I knew this landmark theatre would be my next targeted exposure in this rich artistic Bulgarian city, Sofia.