

# Art for Refugees in Transition

When art helps refugees recover from disaster, making sure they don't lose their roots and culture



Project author or developer:  
**Sara Green**

Where:  
**CO / Colombia / Bogota**

Website:  
**[www.artforrefugees.org/index.html](http://www.artforrefugees.org/index.html)**

## Mission

Art for Refugees in Transition (A.R.T.) helps rebuild individual and community identity for refugees worldwide. Drawing upon the indigenous art forms of each community, A.R.T.'s programs are designed to enable the elders of a culture to educate and incorporate the younger generation in their cultural traditions. By developing self-sustaining curricula and training programs, A.R.T. engages children and adults in visual, performing and creative arts drawn from their own cultures. These activities provide local and international relief institutions with tools to help refugee communities cope with the trauma, terror and dislocation of war and natural disaster.

## History

ART was conceived in 1999, as a response to the ongoing turmoil in the Balkans. Refugees, fleeing the raging warfare were flooding into safe towns. A.R.T.'s founder, Sara Green, earned her MBA at Columbia University with the idea of applying business model skills to the world's refugee populations. She saw fear and hopelessness in the faces of children who had had their childhoods stolen away. But every child loves to sing and dance, to play and feel free. Sara's hope was that, by finding their childhood through their unique ethnic expression, these children could become more than lost refugees. In 2001, she went to Kosovo to work with these children. After several years of research and development, A.R.T.'s initial program was launched in two Burmese refugee camps in Thailand in 2003.

In partnership with the International Rescue Committee, (IRC) A.R.T. successfully introduced and implemented its pilot program, working with elders and children of the Burmese Karen, Karenni and Shan tribes. A.R.T.'s programs were enthusiastically embraced "by both young and old. For these Burmese refugees, their cultural expression creates purpose where there is little or no hope of getting out of the camps and returning home.

A.R.T. is currently running its programs in barrio Tintalito, localidad Kennedy, Bogotá, and Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia, Colombia. Currently, Colombia is undergoing the largest humanitarian catastrophe in the Western Hemisphere. Armed conflict has created displacement throughout Colombia where over three million of its thirty six million inhabitants have become refugees.

## Goals

Over seven million refugees have lived in camps for 10 years or more. 43rd World Refugee Survey, U.S. Committee for Refugees. Long after international relief organizations have provided food, clothing, shelter, medical care and sanitation, hapless refugees so often languish in camps that are little more than human warehouses. Once basic relief is provided, the refugees need help to create and maintain their sense of community, and to prepare them to get on with their lives in a strange country. Here is where A.R.T. steps in, developing a specific curriculum for each group, based on the refugees' own indigenous arts, helping them to re-establish intergenerational relationships rooted in their own culture, and thus giving them the impetus and tools to rebuild their communities. A.R.T.'s programs are designed to affect the lives of children and adults living in refugee

