100 Buddha sculptures emerge in communities

By Suresh Shah
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CHICAGO: A collaborative public art and civic engagement project, Ten Thousand Ripples (TTR), is being presented by Changing Worlds in partnership with 10 Chicago-area neighborhoods and over a dozen community organizations.

At the center of TTR are 100 fiberglass and resin Buddha sculptures designed by award-winning artist Indira Johnson and installed at sites in 10 Chicago-area neighborhoods. Sites are chosen by the stakeholders in each community who are also planning and implementing related artistic programming. TTR uses art as a catalyst to foster dialog about peace and non-violence and create innovative solutions to address contemporary social issues.

“A powerful and profound need exists within each of us to know that peace is possible in spite of the violence that surrounds us,” said Johnson. “Ten Thousand Ripples is a reminder of that need. It invokes the image of an emerging Buddha as a widely held symbol of peace, inviting people to think about how they can find peace in their own lives and in their communities.”

Fifty sculptures are being installed in five communities this fall: Albany Park, Pilsen, Rogers Park, South Chicago and Uptown. TTR will install 50 more sculptures in five more communities in Spring 2013: Auburn Gresham, Back of the Yards, Evanston, Little Village, North Lawndale. The project culminates with a July 2013 exhibit at the Loyola University Museum of Art.

“Ten Thousand Ripples seeks to interrupt violence before it escalates, at a critical moment in time when our city’s murder rate is soaring,” said Mark Rodriguez, Executive Director at Changing Worlds. “What’s compelling is that the Buddha sculptures are seen out-of-context. Chicagoans will encounter the sculptures in unexpected places – many in high-crime or high-violence areas – then pause, we hope, for self-reflection and to engage their communities in dialog about violence prevention.”

TTR is a partnership between artist Indira Johnson and Changing Worlds, the lead organization in a consortium of local community, social service, educational and cultural organizations. Community partners include among others Evanston Art Center, Loyola University, Northeastern Illinois University.

Each community brings its own distinctive approach to TTR through neighborhood-based programming such as art walks, art-making workshops, art-based block parties, beautification projects and bike tours. Additionally, communities will provide written and visual documentation of the TTR planning process, and Arts in Action Plans for continued integration of the arts.
Award-winning artist and non-violence and peace educator Indira Freitas Johnson received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has received numerous awards, including the prestigious Illinois Governors Award for the Arts.

Changing Worlds is an educational arts nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster inclusive communities through oral history, writing and art programs that improve student learning, affirm identity and enhance cross-cultural understanding. Founded in 1996 at Hibbard Elementary School in Albany Park, Changing Worlds now reaches more than 10,000 students and community members annually through its arts and cultural awareness programs.

To learn more, including a map showing all Buddha sculptures installed to date and a calendar of upcoming events, visit www.TenThousandRipples.com.