

People Move in the Direction of The Images They Create



Detail, Mahogany Singing Tree to Reunite Children With Their Families

Laurie Marshall, Author, Innovator and Artist

Educator George Hoffer spoke these powerful words – “People move in the direction of the images they create.” His statement reflects that, like any tool, social media can be used for positive or negative results. Wielding Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, Parlor, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube or Reddit, today’s communicators can promote cohesion or division, love or hatred, understanding or deceit, beauty or ugliness.

As a nation we often celebrate the individual hero, with far fewer messages about the heroic accomplishments that arise from collective action. With a different approach, Unity Through Creativity Foundation invites the public to co-create

visions of healing heartbreak and success to community challenges. We generate images that support people going in the direction of unity, love, understanding and beauty. Our signature program is The Singing Tree Project, a collaborative mural process of Peace-Building-Through-Art. This methodology draws upon Nature's model, particularly trees and forests. It is an invitation to everyone on the planet to transcend conflict in order to co-create, inspired by Meredith Miller, an 8-year old child who asked, "What if the whole world made a painting together?" Unity Through Creativity Foundation has taken on this vision, supporting artistic programs that help build inclusive and beloved communities. A forest of 99 Singing Tree™ murals has grown over 20 years—drawn and painted by over 20,000 people from 52 countries. Like Nature, the murals embrace diversity with local conditions determining the form, and interdependent connections producing innovation. Most of the murals have been youth-led with multigenerational participation. The murals demonstrate that co-creation is possible, powerful and beautiful in a time when the news is full of stories of division, paralysis and violence. By having a common creative experience, conflicting groups of people have found common ground. The murals have envisioned success to the challenges of violence, racial conflict, climate chaos, autism, water, addiction, poverty and child abuse. They have led to innovative tree forestation, solar and educational projects and mentoring programs. These positive actions are spread through the power of social media.

The Mahogany Singing Tree to Reunite Children with Their Families is a work in progress. The goal of the 11' x 7' canvas mural is to raise awareness of the 368 children who are still separated from their families at the U.S./Mexican border as of June, 2021. They represent a subset of the 5700 children who experienced the trauma of family disruption in the last five years. When completed in September, the mural will contain 368 leaves, each one symbolizing the joy of a child

being in the arms of their loved ones. Middle school students at Hearthstone School in Sperryville, Virginia came up with the design. The Mahogany Tree was chosen because the species is endangered, just as children who are separated are in danger.



Study for 11' x 7' Mahogany Singing Tree mural

Unity Through Creativity Foundation is partnering with Redesign Training to raise \$25,000 for KIND (Kids In Need of Defense) who have reunited 1100 families to date. Money has been donated by the project to plant 2000 mahogany trees in Guatemala through IGive Trees. **On Sept. 11, from 10:00 am-4:00**

pm PST there will be an on-line and in-person workday to complete the mural. Reach out to admin@UnityThroughCreativity.org if you are interested in contributing.

The ***Mahogany Singing Tree*** uses collaborative image creation and social media to maximize the effectiveness of this positive visual statement. The final image will be reproduced to support the humane treatment of children in the immigration process and to raise funds for KIND. Word about the project is being spread by Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter.



As the stakes grow higher with climate chaos, pandemics, mass migrations and the rise of autocracies, creating a peaceful world is daunting. The next ten years will shape the next hundred. We need to maximize the power of our social media, moving together in the direction of turning pain into purpose, trauma into beauty, mistrust into connection, and vision into innovation. It's all hands on deck!



The Restorative Justice Singing Tree of Peace 8'x 16', Oakland, CA USA, 2020



About the Author: For 35 years, Author, Innovator and Artist Laurie Marshall has empowered youth and adults through creative collaboration. She practices Peace Building through Art, inspired by Nature. A visionary educator, she has served mostly low-income children, families and their schools as an Arts

Integration and Project Based Learning specialist. Her mission is to nurture creativity, a love of learning and a collaborative spirit.

She is founder of Unity Through Creativity Foundation and the Singing Tree Project.

In addition, Laurie is a certified K-12 Art and Social Studies Teacher with training in the Waldorf Curriculum, Conversational Intelligence, Peace Literacy and Outward Bound. Her B.A. from Antioch College in history and education, and M.A. in art and education from Beacon College laid the

groundwork for her innovative use of visual art and storytelling in consensus building, leadership training and conflict prevention with government organizations (NASA, FEMA, Department of Interior, U.S. Botanical Gardens), public and alternative schools, hospitals and prisons. She is based in Novato, CA, with two grown sons and their families in Texas.