



Sara Chang's photographic collage mandala will be on display at FSU's Museum of Fine Arts along with many other peace related artwork by national and local artists, AMANDA THOMPSON

Acting with art

Waging Peace exhibit reaches into the classroom

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"How do we proactively practice peace in our lives?" Local artist and educator Sara Chang often contemplates this question. Her photographic collage mandalas symbolize wholeness and balance. She finds the process of creating them is meditative and allows her to achieve a state of inner peace.

Chang is one of 40 artists whose work has been selected by a team of local educators to be shown in the Waging Peace exhibition at the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts (MoFA). The concept of peace is infused throughout her work as both an artist and the reading coach at Pineview Elementary School.

"Every day I try to practice what the Dalai Lama teaches: connect to all sentient beings and practice loving

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Waging Peace exhibit

FSU MoFA's exhibit is on display from May 14 – July 8. The opening reception is on Thursday, May 17 from 6-8 p.m.

The Anderson Brickler Gallery's exhibit is on display from May 19 – June 9. The opening reception is on Saturday May 19 from 2-5 p.m.

COCA's exhibit at the City Hall Art Gallery is on display from May 9 – July 9. The opening reception is on Thursday, May 24 from 6-7:30 p.m.

The Plant's exhibition is on display through May.

To learn more, visit www.TallahasseeArts.org for details.



Tranquil Symbols by Saskia Kapoor-Sisask of Montford Middle School is on display at the City Hall Gallery.

AMANDA THOMPSON

Exhibit

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kindness and compassion," she shared. Her advice to others searching for personal balance is to "be patient and stay in the moment to experience awareness. Be proactive, not reactive." She contends that one of the best ways to achieve this is through art making. It's "a creative process, not destructive," she said.

This is one of the driving principles behind the Waging Peace exhibit, the sixth show at MoFA to be co-curated by educators in the community. Leading the charge is Dr. Viki Thompson Wylder, Education Curator at the museum. To her, the operative word is "waging."

"I don't want anyone to think of peace as passive," she said. "Peace is an active process. You have to be involved, think, act, do. We have a whole host of global problems and each one of us needs to make a contribution."

That includes children. "We need to start talking to kids when they're little or we won't have people who feel they can do something and speak up."

In an effort to carry that forward, the curatorial team also created an educational guide to compliment the artworks selected for the MoFA exhibition. "That's important," explains Wylder, "because it starts the process of integrating the exhibit into the classroom."

For the past several months, these lessons plans were implemented across the community and many of the artworks created by K-12 grade students will be exhibited at MoFA and in extension exhibits at several other venues as well.

One of the members of the curatorial team is Donald Sheppard, art teacher at Montford Middle School. He said "anytime students feel like they can participate in a positive way, it's valuable for them. This theme gives them an opportunity to make a statement about their world and even be influential. We're seeing our youth rising up and taking charge. They have something to say and they can do that through their art. An image can move us to action. If not action, at least dialog and contemplation. That's powerful."

Sheppard was especially pleased that the Waging Peace theme allowed for multiple interpretations. Students used a wide variety of materials, techniques and imagery. "Just to see so many different ideas, it has been encouraging. It says to me that there's room at

the table for everyone. Diversity has quite a place here."

Inspired by Sara Chang's mandalas, some of Sheppard's art students created their own. Using colored pencils, sixth-grader Saskia Kapoor-Sisask created a personal mandala she titled "Tranquil Symbols" which represented inner peace. A few of Sheppard's students, like eighth grader Jaden Story, chose to focus their attention outward.

Sheppard explained that in Jaden's piece titled "The Lion and the Lamb," she "intentionally placed these symbolic animals together. She's astute with value and contrast and she included those principles of art to make a statement about commonalities versus things that make us different."

Many students used techniques like collage or mosaic and art elements like contrast and balance that reinforce the artwork's message. "What you work with speaks as well," said Sheppard. "When you choose your medium, it becomes an avenue for what you want to say. These students get that."

As much as the selection of materials helps push the message of peace forward, the Waging Peace initiative has modeled the concept of collaboration and inclusivity from the beginning. A truly cooperative effort, there are numerous community partners involved in the Waging Peace project including MoFA, the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA), The Plant, the Anderson Brickler Gallery, The Holocaust Education Resource Council, and many area schools.

Sheppard, Wylder, Chang and many others have worked together to build a positive visual representation of what peace can look like in our schools, community, nation and world. Though the possibility of enduring peace can seem, at times, far away, Sheppard is hopeful.

"When you're moving something that's heavy, one person might move it an inch but when we all get together, get around it, and use our energies we can pick it up. Waging peace is something we all believe in and we've had the opportunity to gather around and now it's time to pick it up and go."

There are several exhibitions related to the community-wide Waging Peace project. They are all free and open to the general public. To learn more, visit www.TallahasseeArts.org for details.

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).