



# TEN THOUSAND RIPPLES

*Public Art, Peace, and Civic Engagement*



## From One to Many: The Ripple Effect

Like the ripple effect that is created by throwing a stone in a pond, the reach and impact of the Ten Thousand Ripples project will have a lasting impact beyond the thousands of individuals who saw the Buddha sculptures, participated in arts or community-based programs, explored new ways to engage in their communities, and came to new realizations of peace.

- Over 15,000 Chicago-area residents involved in arts, community, peace, and civic engagement initiatives throughout nine Chicago-area communities and beyond
- 100 Buddha sculptures
- 87 community, education, and arts organizations involved

### TEN THOUSAND RIPPLES INITIATED ACTIVITIES



### POST TEN THOUSAND RIPPLES COMMUNITY-BASED CONTINUED AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES



## INTRODUCTION

PAMELA E. AMBROSE, DIRECTOR OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART

**I HAVE WATCHED WITH GREAT PLEASURE** the success of the Ten Thousand Ripples project, from its early conception by Indira Freitas Johnson, to the physical manifestation of the project 18 months later in communities throughout Chicago. One hundred images of the emerging Buddha were placed in city lots, under viaducts, and on major thoroughfares, acting as agents of change through the chance encounters of passersby.

What are we to make of these calm Buddhas in repose, rising from the earth, beach sand, or concrete? A great diversity of people in communities from Albany Park to South Chicago created works of art, dance, literature, film, and photography to answer that question.



Indira, well known for her art installations of public engagement, envisioned the symbol of the Buddha as a catalyst for conversation, a provocation of the best kind: the initiation of dialogue on peace and the challenge of ending violence in our city.

Loyola University Museum of Art (LUMA) is proud to have been part of this project, which illustrates so clearly LUMA's mission of exploring artistic expression that illuminates the enduring spiritual questions of all cultures and societies. I am so pleased to have been a cultural partner with Indira and Changing Worlds, the non-profit organization who assumed a major role in the project, and our neighborhood communities who brought this project to fruition.

The name *Ten Thousand Ripples* suggests that people can be moved to extraordinary efforts to bring about change. The stories and testimonies that follow illustrate the promise of this ambitious ideal.

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

MARK RODRIGUEZ, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
CHANGING WORLDS

**AMBITIOUS IN ITS BREADTH** and bold in its objectives, Ten Thousand Ripples (TTR) is rooted in the belief that art is for people, that community art should contribute to daily life, and that the arts have the power to activate civic engagement, ignite creative ambitions, and foster safe forums for residents to talk. These initial beliefs led artists, arts- and community-based organizations, and leaders from across Chicago to envision, support, and advance TTR in their studios, organizations, neighborhoods, and lives. The project brought about community conversations that cultivated new partnerships and increased access to the arts, while establishing a basis for mutual understanding.

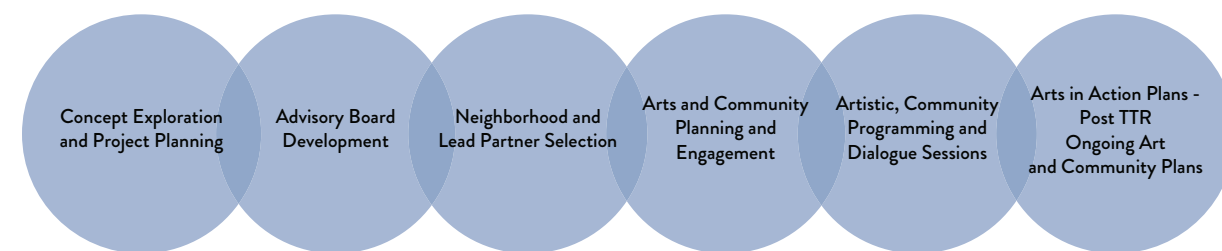
## ARTISTIC INSPIRATIONS

The idea for TTR was formed over five years ago, when artist Indira Johnson exhibited an installation of emerging Buddha sculptures at the Chicago Cultural Center. She noticed visitors contemplating the sculptures—many even told her that they felt a sense of peace. For Johnson, who had used the emerging Buddha image for over a decade as a symbol of peace and self-realization, this response resonated. She wondered what reaction the sculptures would provoke if they were located in public spaces, like storefronts or abandoned lots. This thought led to the development of TTR.

## FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY

To bring this idea to life, we deployed a six-step approach to support the development, engagement, and implementation of the project in diverse communities across Chicago. The diagram below summarizes the various project components that occurred across all communities. While one of the key strengths of the project is its ability to take on a different shape based on the unique needs and interests of each of the neighborhood partners, each community followed the same framework.

## DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK



## THE JOURNEY

In 2010, a leading grant from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation helped seed the project's development and launch a planning process to explore how this inspiring sculpture could impact public spaces and communities. While the image of the Buddha is a symbol of peace for Johnson, it can be a surprising and sometimes provocative one for others, especially when seen on city streets. Early public engagement was of the utmost importance. The planning process began with Johnson inviting leaders from arts, social service, community, and educational institutions to form an Advisory Council to help shape the TTR project. In 2011, Changing Worlds partnered with Johnson to serve as the project's lead agency. Through planning retreats, Changing Worlds and its partners developed goals and objectives for the project, established a framework for community engagement, and adopted a set of desired outcomes and elements across partnering communities. From the onset, a central goal of the initiative was to bring public art to neighborhoods across the city. To accomplish this goal, we sought out strong community-based organizations to partner with as the lead agency in each community. As the project began to move forward, nine Chicago-area neighborhoods stepped up to take part, from South Chicago and North Lawndale on the South Side to Evanston Township and Rogers Park on Chicago's northernmost border.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSFORMATIONS

As community partnerships were solidified, TTR transitioned from centralized planning to community-based planning and engagement. Planning included research and conversations with both secular and faith-based leaders. This process took on different shapes per community, but across the board it included community forums, installation site recommendations, artistic programming ideas, resource leveraging, and implementation timelines. Over the period of three to four months, hundreds of residents were engaged in brainstorming sessions, community forums, and community arts planning. The process transformed everyday citizens into ambassadors of peace, arts, and culture. Each neighborhood received ten sculptures, which they installed in sites chosen by their residents. From the picturesque Loyola Dunes on the North Side to urban gardens and abandoned lots on the South and West Sides of Chicago, the installations were as varied as the communities we served. Despite these differences, all communities used the image as a creative catalyst to bring people together to engage in conversations about contemporary social issues, promote peace, ignite new ideas for artistic and community programming, and coalesce entities that would not have otherwise come together. A project that started as the idea of one visionary artist has shaped the landscape of numerous communities, created new artistic programming for thousands of residents, reached more than 300,000 visitors from around the world on social media, and sparked a lasting ripple effect. The TTR project highlights the power of the arts to transform public spaces, communities, and lives.

# SYMBOL AS CATALYST

INDIRA FREITAS JOHNSON, LEAD ARTIST

**CONTEXT COLORS THE MEANINGS** of an image or symbol. The Buddha image is widely recognized across cultures for evoking tranquility and spiritual attainment. It suggests the longing of individuals and societies for peace. For more than a decade, my art has used the image of an emerging Buddha to stimulate reflection on the human search for self-understanding and peace. Growing out of the earth, the Buddha image reflects our own growth and change—and the ability to create well-being and community that can come with maturity.

The context the Ten Thousand Ripples project (TTR) created for this image is interwoven with the vibrant life of the Chicago area’s diverse communities. Collaboration and early public engagement were essential elements of TTR. The first year of this two-year project was spent actively connecting with community organizations in the participating neighborhoods. Through these connections, we learned about the many ways people were viewing and responding to the Buddha image. Block clubs, neighborhood meetings, and community gatherings became sites for conversations and sustained dialogue that were the foundation for building trust.

From the onset, TTR invited community members to develop the project in ways that suited the local context and to be involved in creating meanings for the sculpture and the project as a whole. TTR served as a catalyst to bring together community members to discuss local issues and generate ideas for artistic and community programming. Through collaborative decision-making and creative activities, TTR gave individuals and organizations an opportunity to coalesce—some of whom were previously unknown to one another.

The resonance of a symbol depends in large part on the scope of the viewer’s past experience. Respecting and working with differences was integral to TTR. Neighborhood meetings in Pilsen, a largely Mexican Catholic community, brought up issues of culture, ethnicity, and faith, as the image of the Buddha was alien to many residents. However, in the ensuing discussion, some residents agreed that Pilsen was part of a larger world and would benefit from exposure to symbols and images from other cultures. The importance of dialogue as a way to exchange ideas and deepen one’s understanding of different points of view also became apparent. This was also the case with the panel discussion at a Buddhist Temple in Uptown, where Buddhist, Muslim, and Native American leaders, artists and the audience shared viewpoints about cultural appropriation.



A key element of TTR for me was learning about the social and political contexts of public space in communities where definitions of public and safe access to public space constantly change. Community members chose where to place their sculptures, which themselves were transformed by the physical and social contexts of each site—whether an abandoned lot or community garden, a school entrance or gang boundary. By their very presence, the sculptures invited viewers to reconsider the meanings of both the sculptures and the sites, and encouraged new perspectives and experiences.

A catalytic symbol can direct thought, prompt associations, and alter perception. Its meaning can evolve over time and be transformative. Throughout the city the emerging Buddha sculptures were welcomed, hugged, interacted with, ignored, debated, occasionally graffitied, offered gifts, and protected. They provoked questions, introspection, and conversation at the individual and community level.

The Buddha image invited people to reflect on the possibility of an end to violence and the emergence of peace, and to draw on individual and communal resources for moving from reflection to action. Jequeline Salinas, an art teacher who worked on TTR projects with students at Hedges School spoke of her thoughts and feelings about the sculpture: “For me, the Buddha image symbolizes *la esperanza*—meaning the *hope*. The hope I feel deep inside my soul. It is the desire that my students and school community can find peace, live peace.”

# NORTH LAWDALE: THE PERMACULTURIST

ANNAMARIA LEON

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Lawndale Christian Development Corporation, Chicago Urban Art Retreat, Chicago Botanical Gardens, North Lawndale Green Youth Farm, One Straw Garden, Homan Square, Better Boys Foundation, North Lawndale College Prep (Christiana Campus and Collins Campus), Power House High School

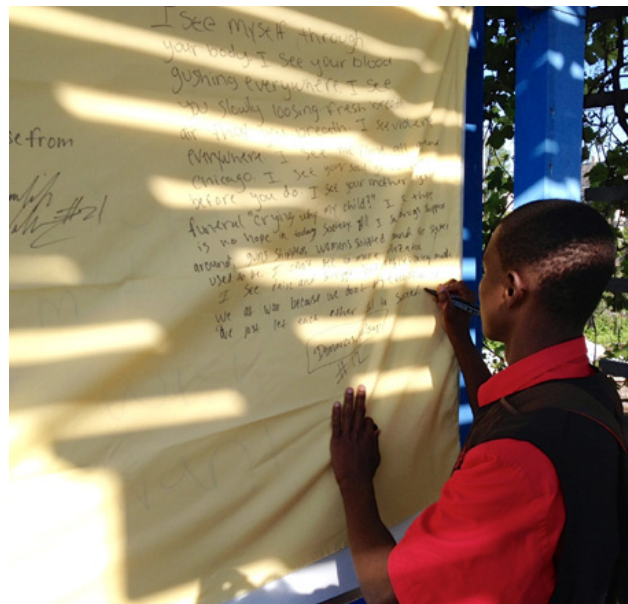


“**THE WORK THAT I DO** is not very pretty,” Annamaria Leon admits. As a permaculturist, her focus is on sustainability and regeneration, not flash or fleeting beauty. Her gardens are replete with roots and vines and bushes and small trees—plants that, in their early years, could be mistaken for weeds. “It takes a lot of patience. The city has mowed them down twice.”

Her neighborhood of choice is North Lawndale, where vacant lots abound—the ghosts of demolished buildings and the inheritance of underdevelopment. The isolation of the lots attracts gang activity and drug deals, and Leon has seen SWAT teams with AK-47s rounding up gangbangers from her balcony.

Leon learned about the Ten Thousand Ripples project at a community meeting and her interest was immediately piqued. A native Filipino and a practitioner of Buddhism, the symbol called to her spiritually, while the connection between public space and the promotion of peace was clear.

“I just read this article about how climate change promotes violence—especially as the temperatures rise, people become more violent. Everything arises from the soil. Our whole lives are dependent on the first 18 inches of soil on this planet—that microbial activity keeps us alive. You can tell the health of a community from the health of its soil.”



Implanting the Buddha in the One Straw Community Garden at the intersection of Christiana Avenue and Douglas Boulevard, Leon watched the reactions of community members as she gardened. “It was really funny. In the beginning, the kids would walk around it, they’d touch it—then they’d kick it!” Leon would engage with passersby, explaining the project and the meaning behind the symbol. Other sculptures popped up around the community, at the Better Boys Foundation and Homan Square, at Lawndale College Prep and the Chicago Urban Art Retreat Center.

At first, some residents were concerned by potential religious overtones—but over time, religious concerns diminished, with community members noting that Gandhi, a proclaimed Buddhist, was a hero to Martin Luther King, Jr. Understanding spread and reactions changed. “I’d see people as they’d walk by the sculpture—they’d slow down. And maybe they didn’t even understand why. Once the Buddha sculpture was gone, people would say, ‘What happened to the Buddha sculpture?’ I was really surprised. More and more people come up to me... It became something permanent in people’s minds.”

Leon believes in the restorative power of subtle change. Her gardens may not be much to look at, but they’re slowly growing a cornucopia of delights: plums, pears, wild black cherries, blackberries, currants. The bounty will feed a two-block radius of neighbors at a second annual community feast in October, with an estimated 20 guests—up from three this time last year.

Most of the sculptures may be gone, but spin-off Peace Parks are planned by the Chicago Urban Art Retreat Center. Ten vacant lots will be converted into parks, with residents using recycled materials to create African American hero statues. Barack Obama is almost complete, with Maya Angelo, among others, in the works. A fever of collaboration has broken out of the project, with Loud Grade Produce Squad, Lawndale Neighborhood Housing Services, Chicago Botanic Gardens, Lawndale Christian Development Corporation, North Lawndale Greening Committee, and Chicago Cares all getting their hands dirty.

North Lawndale’s growing focus on peaceful, sustainable public space is not a revelation to Leon. As she says, “A lot of activity happens when you plant on the edges—in communities on the edges.”



# ALBANY PARK: THE FILMMAKER

JEAN BOULWARE

**JEAN BOULWARE WAS LOOKING** for a film project to pursue with her husband when she stumbled across the Ten Thousand Ripples project. “After I saw Indira’s presentation on the project, I decided I needed to get involved,” she explains. “Indira herself is so moving—when she speaks, she’s very passionate about her work.”

Boulware, who saw Johnson speak at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual International Conference on Art and Nonviolence at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) in autumn 2012, herself graduated from NEIU with a degree in psychology this past spring. The combined social and artistic aspects of the project appealed to Boulware and her husband Jason—on film, it would be both intellectually and aesthetically compelling; a “good way to capture the social impact of art.”

As they began filming the project, the team developed an interest in the reactions of passersby on the street to the sculpture. While people didn’t always know about the project, they often expressed a sense of captivation. “We did run into a lot of people that would tell us about having seen the sculptures and then seeking out the other sculptures,” Boulware says. “One person was going around taking pictures of them because he thought they were cool.”

The project culminated in a film, *White Lotus Rising*, which “flows from organizations to individuals to artist interviews with this same movement to capture the kinesthetic nature of the peace project.” Debuted at the American Psychological Association Conference in Honolulu this summer, the film took home the festival award for “Best Documentary Short.” It has since been submitted for competition at the Sundance Film Festival.

Through her film project, Boulware has seen the unique responses and projects undertaken in each community—from students’ artwork created in school and drum circles in local parks, to peace parades and residents’ solitary moments with the sculptures. “The most powerful moments were the interviews with the children at Hedges School in Back of the Yards,” says Boulware. “It was so amazing to hear these children’s stories about where they came from and how these sculptures affected them.”

Apart from the conference at NEIU and children’s programs organized by Global Explorers Kids, Albany Park hosted peace walks, a jazz concert, and bicycle and walking tours of the Buddha sculptures, coordinated with support from the North River Commission, along with other interested residents. “Ten Thousand Ripples gave us something that we all shared—something in common that brought us together,” Boulware says. “I would have never met these people otherwise.”

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

North River Commission, Northeastern Illinois University, Albany Park Safety Networks, Global Explorers Kids, Frankenstone Studio, North River School, Global Garden, Albany Park Community Center, Ecuador Unido



# UPTOWN: THE ARTIST

EDEN UNLUATA

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Uptown United, Bridgeview Bank, Uptown Art Center, Tattoo Factory, Uplift School, Buttercup Park Advisory Council, Alderman James Cappleman, Bike Uptown, Baker and Nosh, MDT Architects, Hoa Lan Salon, Peoples Church, SSA #34



**EDEN UNLUATA RECOGNIZES** fragmentation. Having grown up in both the United States and Turkey, he saw the conflicts that arose due to a lack of cultural understanding. “I saw the problem in my parents. I saw the problems I experienced as I moved around.”

A resident of Uptown, one of Chicago’s most culturally diverse neighborhoods, Unluata still sees the barriers that continue to divide us. “People think of Uptown as a diverse neighborhood—a more honest description of Uptown is that it’s a fragmented neighborhood. Diversity implies that there is some line of communication among various communities,” he says.

Unluata is an interdisciplinary artist and adjunct faculty member in Columbia College’s Interactive Arts and Media Department, whose own work focuses on processes of “cultural exchange—or the lack thereof.” When he heard about the project from an email sent out by Uptown United, a community economic development organization, he was immediately drawn to the project’s format. “I felt the temporary nature of Ten Thousand Ripples and the residency were good ways to experiment with cross-boundary communication,” he explains.

Arriving at the community’s theme—Unity through Diversity—was easy for participants in Uptown’s first meeting. Residents liked the way the project “offered some pathways in how we can establish a more diverse neighborhood in which there is communication across various boundaries.” The cultural iconography

of the Buddha invited conversation from Uptown’s robust Buddhist community while asking the broader question: what do we have in common?

The resulting project, *Transparent Depictions*, led by Filipino-American artist Trisha Martin, explored Uptown’s “diversity, differences, and the themes that unify them.” Through four workshops, participants, including Unluata, used writing, papermaking, imagery, and books as sculpture. The artists used vintage wooden window frames to help symbolize “looking through the window to the other side—a way to peer into each other’s worlds,” Unluata says.

The project brought diverse members of the community into contact with each other, and “gave the idea, the notion of what art can do,” Unluata says. In addition to the workshops, the community organized a “positive loitering event,” claiming the space surrounding one of the Buddha sculptures as an official hangout spot one summer evening. Uptown United, along with Bike Uptown and Bronco Billy Park, developed and led a biking tour of the sculptures installed around Uptown.

While people sometimes see public sculptures or murals as the limit to art in Uptown, Ten Thousand Ripples “allowed people to think of art and art-making not as the end result, but as the process,” Unluata says. “People have taken the lesson and interaction and community that have been built and are moving on to the next step.”

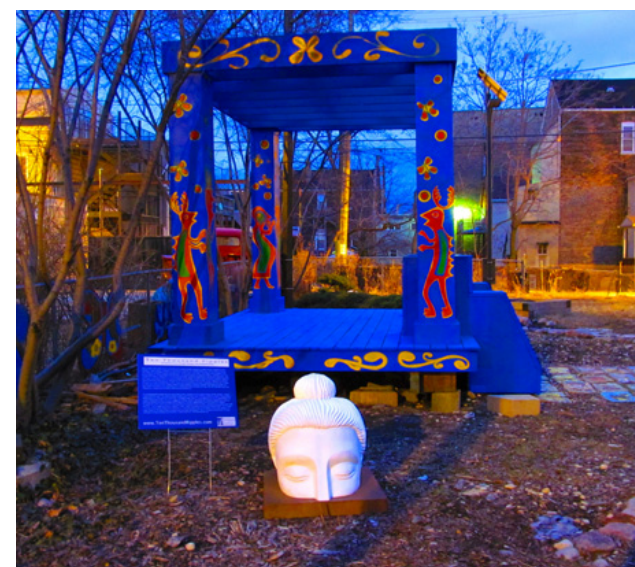
# PILSEN: THE SCULPTOR

ALFONSO “PILOTO” NIEVES

**ALFONSO “PILOTO” NIEVES LIKES** to focus on the things that pull us together.

As a sculptor and the lead teaching artist for the community of Pilsen, Nieves led local students from kindergarten through twelfth grade in projects centered on peace. To prepare the students for the complexity of the theme, he spent the first few weeks simply leading discussions.

While Pilsen has gotten safer in recent years, an undercurrent of violence still plagues the community, with a number of homicides recorded annually. “[The students] don’t seem to feel threatened until you really dig into it and talk to them about it—then everything starts coming up. Everybody is afraid of gangs. We were talking about how this fear will drive people crazy... on both sides. The guy with the gun, and the guy without one.”



Nieves and his students created a group silhouette background using plywood, with each student sculpting a face of their design with clay. The group then painted a galaxy across the front of the piece, emphasizing connectivity across the universe. Individuals’ hands form into birds, and a flock of papier-mâché birds hovers above the installation. “We chose birds because they can fly—they connect the sky with the earth,” Nieves explains.

For Nieves, the experience of community violence is familiar. Originally from Querétaro, Mexico, he grew up in a *vecindad*—a large building with many apartments nestled close together. Gang activity and restless violence proliferated. “It was a little bit different—there were no guns then, it was all fists and knives. People would come to my neighborhood to fight.”

When Nieves moved to an industrialized area on the edge of town, near a collection of American factories, he saw the inequality inherent in economic and social fragmentation. While some neighbors would wash their clothing and drink from the contaminated river, those across the lake would go waterskiing in the clean, fresh water. “I started to see all this imbalance,” he explains. “People using this precious source of life as a source of recreation.”

The conflicts and divisions Nieves observed gave him a fascination with the things that connect us. “There are a lot of things that separate us from each other as human beings: race, gender, religion—things society has implanted in our head.” For the Ten Thousand Ripples project, Nieves says, “We were looking farther—what does

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

ElevArte Community Studio, La Casa, The Resurrection Project, The Pilsen Planning Committee, Gads Hill Center, Jardin de Las Mariposas, National Museum of Mexican Art, Dvorak Park, Pilsen Growing Station Sembradores Unidos, Irma Ruiz Elementary School, Rudy Lozano High School, Bank of America, St Adalbert’s Church, Alderman Daniel Solis, Sembradores Unidos and Plaza Tenochtitlan

it mean: peace? That we have one thing in common.”

Drawing on the themes of nonviolence and connectivity, students participated in a peace march organized by EleveArte Community Studio in the spring, which incorporated drums, prayer flags, and decorated cardboard butterflies, and culminated at the Buddha sculpture in the Jardin de las Mariposas. They also created their own sculpture in response to

the Buddha located at Gads Hill Center, where their program took place.

The program has given Nieves an opportunity to impart his own wisdom on his students, from a place of experience. “I told them, ‘All the worst things that can happen to you—those are experiences. They happen to give you knowledge. The mistakes are sacred: they’ll teach you a lot.’”





# ROGERS PARK: THE RETIREE

JOHN LAMPING

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Partners for Rogers Park, Loyola University, Family Matters, Sol Café, Heartland Café, Momentum Sensorium, Alderman Joe Moore, LEEDA Family Services, Loyola Dunes Restoration Project, Rogers Park Business Alliance



**JOHN LAMPING CAME ACROSS** the Ten Thousand Ripples project entirely by chance. “I was scanning for local news and I happened across an article,” he explains. “It sparked my interest. I had one question: what do I have to do to get one?”

Through Chris Skrable, a member of Partners for Rogers Park, Lamping arranged for the first of the Buddha sculptures to be installed in the dunes along the lakeshore, near Loyola University. As Facebook administrator for the Loyola Dunes Restoration Project—which aims to naturally restore the natural vegetation and beach front of the Loyola Dunes—Lamping then offered to take over the Facebook page for Ten Thousand Ripples.

A retired scientist who used to work for an oil, gas, and minerals company, Lamping may seem like an unlikely candidate to spearhead the project’s main social media platform—but that would be a limited view. Lamping dabbles in painting, sketching, and water color, among other art forms. When you walk into his house, you’re greeted with a sign that commands, “Go into your studio and do art.”

Administration of the Facebook page gave Lamping a uniquely broad view of public interest in the project—ranging from local community members to site visits and messages from people across the world. Lamping lists off the counties he’s seen represented: Romania, Georgia, Russia, Australia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Macau, Ecuador, Bermuda, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, and Mozambique, among others. He’s seen the site visits explode over time as

well, with more than 4,300 visitors in one week, and individual postings receiving as many as 1,000 views.

The messages he receives, he says, are “All very encouraging—people love the postings, they like the idea. It’s uplifting.” One of the most frequent comments he receives, he says, is “Can you please come and do it with us?”

The Buddha sculpture he helped install along the lakeshore—emerging from the sand near the lake, surrounded by a growth of dune grass—has become one of the most strikingly photographed, publicly engaged sculptures. Rogers Park residents held yoga classes beside the statue. Parents walked with children out to see the Buddha. Lone residents or small groups communed with the sculpture as well. “I found a very nice pot filled with beach stones, with a candle in it,” Lamping describes. “Another time there was an empty vodka bottle, some withered flowers, and a harmonica.”

“I expected that I would be most impressed by interactions of adult, but it was the responses of children that I found most interesting,” says Lamping. He describes a community drum circle in which parents and children both were participating—with the children the most “exuberant and robust.”

When police stopped by to ensure everything was all right, they were given drums and gongs and joined in themselves. “You toss a pebble into the pond, those ripples make ripples, and it just keeps spreading,” Lamping says.

# BACK OF THE YARDS: THE ART TEACHER

JEQUELINE SALINAS

**JEQUELINE SALINAS, VISUAL ARTS** teacher at Hedges Elementary School in Back of the Yards, can't talk about the Ten Thousand Ripples project without crying.

Salinas is telling the story of a little girl in her class. "She asked to be interviewed [for a video project]. She was so shy—she never talks! So I took her out into the gallery space and asked if she knew what an interview was. 'Yes,' she said. So I said, 'What would you say?' She said, 'When I see the Buddha, it reminds me that I need to talk.' When I asked why, she said, 'Because it doesn't have a mouth.'"

More than an art project, Ten Thousand Ripples provided almost a form of therapy for the children at Hedges. The school, located in Back of the Yards, has

rarely gone a year without violence directly impacting its community in some way. Students have lost aunts and uncles, older siblings, parents. Early in the 2012 school year, a former student was lost. "It becomes part of the suffering in our school community," Salinas says.

When Salinas heard of the project, she fell in love with the idea. "I designed a curriculum that had the concept of peace and symbols of peace for all my students," she explains. "We worked with themes that were connected to the social studies curriculum. It created a format for me to get into discussions about other cultures and religions." Students created papier-mâché doves, worked on their own sculptures to install next to the Buddha in the school's garden, and created drawings and large-scale paintings, among other projects.



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

James Hedges Fine and Performing Arts School, Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, Park Federal Savings, Bishop Peace Garden Association, Richard J. Daley Elementary Academy, Cole Taylor Bank

One soft-spoken fifth-grade student in the class made a mark on peers and adults alike. He had lost his mother to a stray bullet on Halloween years before. "He said the Buddha reminded him of his mother—because she was peaceful," Salinas explains. "A lot of his art is centered around this interruption of peace—and how you can never give up. Everyone in the classroom was so quiet but so compassionate toward him."

Beyond its therapeutic value, the project became a platform for families and school faculty to reach out to each other, discussing the impact of violence on the community. "It started spiraling into real beautiful conversations—not just with the students, but with the parents." Salinas describes how the parents dust off and take care of the sculptures. The respect for the sculptures and their meaning has given students a reverence for the space. "Students feel like they're safe in front of them—it's like they think gang activity won't happen in front of them."

Salinas is continuing to work with themes of nonviolence and conflict resolution in the wake of Ten Thousand Ripples, and recently won a grant to start a similar project, called *I am emerging*—inspired by student stories and the emerging image of the Buddha sculptures. "This helped in the healing process and the understanding process—and really, the wondering process. It was something that really took us by heart—it really touched us."



# LITTLE VILLAGE: THE PASTOR

RAMIRO RODRIGUEZ

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

J-Def Peace Project, SER Central States, Amor de Dios Church, Little Village Chamber of Commerce, Alderman Ricardo Munoz, Trumbull Community Garden, Little Village Lawndale High School, La Catedral Café, Enlace Chicago, Corkery Elementary School, Sembrando Bajo el Sol Community Garden



**AS A TEENAGER** in Guerrero, Mexico, Ramiro Rodriguez used to travel to nearby communities—too small to have ministers—and give readings. “They’d call me ‘Preacher,’” he says. Currently the pastor at Amor De Dios, Little Village’s United Methodist Church, Pastor Rodriguez has fulfilled that calling.

Home to one of the largest Mexican populations in the Midwest, Little Village is culturally vibrant and community-oriented, but troubled by the effects of poverty—including gang violence. Yet Pastor Rodriguez refuses to accept a one-dimensional version of the neighborhood. “There’s shooting, fighting, especially among our young people,” he says. “But in spite of all that—it’s full of families.”

At first, parishioners were surprised by the presence of the Buddha—the project’s 100<sup>th</sup>—outside a Christian house of worship. “They asked, ‘Are you guys going to be another religion now?’ But it means peace. It stood for peace. That’s why we have the Buddha here.” When Pastor Rodriguez explained the concept of the project, residents embraced the sculptures.

The community engagement aspect of Ten Thousand Ripples connected more broadly with Pastor Rodriguez’ practical approach to community improvement. “The communities don’t only need hymns—they also need food,” he points out. When he began ministration for

Amor De Dios in 2005, there was no food pantry. “We started serving 27 families and now we are serving over 400 families per week,” he says. Residents also collect furniture, clothing, mattresses, and other materials to distribute to people in need.

Like eating and clothing oneself, ending violence—spreading survival—is, at heart, a practical concern. Churchgoers participated in art-making activities to spread the message of Ten Thousand Ripples, creating a series of peaceful images to plant in the garden beside the church. “There are rainbows,” Pastor Rodriguez explains. “When you see a rainbow—it means the rain is going to stop.”

A little over a mile from the church, students at Corkery Elementary School also took the message of peace to heart, leading discussions on restorative justice, respectful dialogue, and how to deal with bullying. Students learned about the Native American tradition of peace circles and held a block party featuring music and mural-making.

For Pastor Rodriguez, the project has been a way to remind residents of the true purpose of spirituality and the role of the church: “We’re bringing peace in our minds and our hearts.”

# SOUTH CHICAGO: THE MASTER GARDENER

GREGORY BRATTON

“WE WERE LIKE A MASCOT,” South Chicago resident Gregory Bratton says of the Buddha mounted to the back of his pick-up truck. “We went every place—even to Tennessee.”

Bratton, who got involved with the Ten Thousand Ripples project through the South Chicago-based Claretian Associates, is used to carrying things on his truck. As a master gardener and Director of Horticulture for I Grow Chicago, he has transformed more than 50 vacant lots across the city into vibrant community gardens, and another 12 into urban farms.

“I was one of the people who could help get the word out,” Bratton explains of his decision to install the traveling Buddha. “Everyone stopped, no matter where we went. We took it on the highway; we took it on the freeway. We stopped at a rest stop—you should have seen the attention we got. It was like a parade.” People even stopped Bratton in the middle of traffic to ask about the Buddha.

South Chicago, where Bratton is based, has seen its share of violence. Like much of the rest of the city, increasingly splintered gang rivalries have rendered the neighborhood a territorial landmine. Crossing throughout the neighborhood, the traveling Buddha carried a distinct message of peace, without regard to gang territories or dangerous streets. In fact, rather than avoid “hot spots,” residents of South Chicago hoped to highlight them.

Along with the traveling Buddha, the Claretian Associates helped organize a series of “art attacks” by local artists—short-term art projects—across different community locations, drawing attention to the need for civility and safety. South Chicago Art Center’s *343 Guns* engaged local youth in the creation of symbolic “guns” to represent each of the students who were shot during the 2011-2012 school year.

At Bowen High School, where one sculpture was represented, students wrote and produced their own play, *Searching for Peace*, while the Harlem Theatre Company featured *Zooman and the Sign*, an award-winning play about the effects of violence on a community.

In addition to the Buddha on his truck, Bratton helped install a sculpture in one of his community gardens. People responded with enthusiasm whenever Bratton explained the concept of the project. “I told them, ‘It represents peace, harmony, and ending the violence in your community.’ They loved it. I didn’t run into anyone that didn’t like it.”



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Claretian Associates, Bowen High School, Epic Academy, South Chicago Art Center, Casa Kirk Apartments, People’s Park, Intergenerational Growing Project, CeaseFire South Chicago, La Causa, Chicago Area Project, Buffalo Senior Inspirational Community Garden



# EVANSTON: THE CAFÉ OWNER

SUSAN TRIESCHMANN

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Evanston Community Foundation, Evanston Arts Council, Evanston Ecology Center, Family Matters, Open Studio Project, Foundation 65, Evanston Art Center, Evanston Public Library, Dewey School, Curt's Café



**THE PHILOSOPHY OF** Evanston's Curt's Café is to "dine with purpose," and the purpose got even broader as customers began noticing a silent, emerging Buddha sculpture in front of the café's door. "People came in and asked, 'Why is it here?'" says Susan Trieschmann, the café's owner.

Located on Evanston's northwestern side, Curt's Café is a nonprofit organization that provides training in food service and life skills for at-risk youth in Evanston. Whereas most organizations turn away youths who've had contact with the criminal justice system or appear to be headed in that direction, Curt's Café deliberately seeks them out for employment and training in subjects ranging from computer literacy to job readiness to food history. The organization acts as a net and a springboard, basing its mission on trust in the fundamental decency and value of people. Student employees range in age from 15 to 22.



While Evanston is calmer than many of Chicago's more troubled community areas, it's still no stranger to gang violence. According to one local report, police attribute five murders and one injury over the past eight years to gang violence between two rival factions in the community. Trieschmann attributes at least some of this violence to frustration due to a lack of jobs.

When Trieschmann heard about the Ten Thousand Ripples project, she approached Indira Johnson to request a sculpture. The goal was to communicate a

strong message about the values of the café and the community at large. Through the process, employees became well-versed in the meaning of the project. "When people came in, there was dialogue. Students were able to talk to them about the sculptures," Trieschmann explains.

Community members overwhelmingly embraced the project. "I did not have one negative comment about it," Trieschmann notes. The café built initiatives based on the popularity of the message, holding community peace circles, hosting discussions on the meaning of nonviolent communication, and even designing postcards for children to color.

Beyond the café, Evanston residents were breaking down barriers in other ways. On nearby Bridge Street, diverse organizations collaborated to provide workshops aimed at community intermingling, while workshops put on

by Family Focus led residents through storytelling, poetry writing, and collage-making activities. A day-long event at Grey Park organized by Open Studio Project helped open conversational doors between residents of Albany Care, an intermediate care facility for people dealing with chronic mental illness, and other residents in the neighborhood. Students at Dewey Elementary School wrote a poem welcoming the sculptures to their community, and Evanston residents created a web to symbolize their interconnectedness and participated in a drum circle at an event in Twiggs Park.

Meanwhile, the at-risk students at Curt's Café learned the ins and outs of the project in communicating it to customers, developing on the café's purpose to help them build a positive future for themselves. "One way to end violence is dialogue," Trieschmann notes. "I think the Buddha speaks to that."



“Where democracy occurs does matter in *how* democracy occurs.”<sup>1</sup>

## ART, DIALOGUE, COMMUNITY, ACTION.

These are large, messy words. But despite their ambiguities, when they intersect and interact, flames of power ignite. This power is what public art desires: to connect people—in words and in action—to something larger than themselves. This is the transformative power of art in the public realm, when individuals, despite societal divisions, connect and assert voice through art.

In these moments, we are seduced into thinking that all public art catalyzes social interaction and discourse. But these moments materialize through an often quiet and slow process: meetings gathering disparate groups and individuals; facilitated discussions; and many phone calls and emails. This back-of-the-house work—marshalling people, resources, and details—may appear unrelated to art, but engaging with the public, especially since the public is not a fixed entity, is an art. While it is understood that no one artwork stands for “art,” and no one conversation defines “dialogue,” “public” is often perceived as a monolithic entity. But “the public” is a vast array of people with multivalent voices and needs, often in conflict. Gathering together and responding to this polyphony of voices throughout the city is the enduring power and vision of Indira Johnson’s public art project Ten Thousand Ripples.

## ROLE OF PUBLIC ART IN THE COMMUNAL SPACE

Art in the public realm historically presented manifestations of solidified power with sculptures commemorating historical leaders or events. In Chicago in 1967, the Picasso sculpture forever changed this. I posit that 10,000 Ripples is part of a further evolution of public art, concerned less with objects and more with a reinvisioning of the commons and the people within it. Since the 1960s, sculpture has shifted from the object itself as the work of art to the spatial experience and the experience of the audience that the work provokes. As Douglas Crimp has written “The viewer, in effect, is the subject of the work.” We can see this shift in thinking about the public realm in various arenas from Hannah Arendt’s ideas of civic engagement, through Joseph Beuys’s social sculpture, to Habermas’s social dimension of public space, or the public sphere where discourse occurs. Including Jane Jacobs’s and William Whyte’s ideas of designing public spaces for socializing and Ray Oldenburg’s “third place” where conversation and social exchange is at the forefront, discussions surrounding public art need to go beyond what will be placed where.

We need to ask: where and what (and even when) is communal space? Who makes these often political decisions about spaces and why? How can art open up the process of civic engagement and forge inclusive alliances to make decisions about public space or the commons? How can artistic placemaking include quality of life discussions?

While the dissemination of Buddha in public space around the city is ostensibly Johnson’s artwork, I posit that the work is actually the dissemination of the relational process of civic dialogue surrounding public space. To begin Ripples, Johnson initiated “a call and response” within communities. The call—to engage in a collaborative community-driven activation of public voice—was triangulated across the city with multiple neighborhood partnerships each answering in their own voice. This “call and response” eventually evolved into each participating community using the Buddhas to address their disparate needs such as Albany Park creating safety and conflict resolution discussions, Back of the Yards using the Buddhas to create a neutral zone, and North Lawndale transforming vacant lots into peace parks.

By seeking out an active citizenry in each neighborhood and by being responsive to their concerns and needs, Johnson allowed the art to reflect the communities’ complexities and to foster divergent relationships to the work. The Buddha became less of an object within public space, a facilitator of a process of opening up dialogue and decision-making. This important distinction, which is not unique to all public art projects, reflects a significant shift in thinking and acting. Johnson not only relinquished her control of the work’s placement but its definitive interpretation. By allowing the Buddha to serve a multiplicity of intents, purposes, and social needs, its meaning became dialogic and relational. The context, or social situation of the communities, was allowed to constitute the meaning and purpose of the work and how public space and the people within it could be activated.

This open process relocates the decision-making arena surrounding public space from capital, state, or city to local inhabitants. Public art, as an extension of public voice, can inspire citizens to exercise their right to not only produce and determine full usage of urban space but to articulate communal needs, hopes, and desires.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Sennet “The New Political Economy and its Culture,” *The Hedgehog Review* 2, no. 1, Spring, 2000, 69. <http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/archives/Democracy/2.1FSennett.pdf>

# THE RIPPLE EFFECT

LISE MCKEAN, PH.D.

Lise McKean, PH.D. is an anthropologist and writer based in Chicago.

*Like a handful of pebbles tossed into the water, 100 sculptures mindfully placed for anyone to see create myriad ripple effects across Chicago.*

**THE FACTS ABOUT TEN THOUSAND RIPPLES (TTR)**—the who, what, when, where, and how many of its planning and implementation—reveal the breadth of this ambitious two-year community art project. TTR materials also record thoughts and ideas, feelings and experiences of individuals and communities and tell us how a public art project can attract participation and galvanize awareness and action at the local level.

Each of the nine TTR communities has its own distinctive composition and dynamics. Poverty and its effects pervade parts of or entire TTR communities. Whether the community is predominantly African American, Latino, or multi-racial and multi-ethnic, all have vibrant and vital local organizations. That local organizations embraced an activist art project is all the more proof of their vision and commitment, especially since they face chronic underfunding and understaffing and acute community need. TTR would not have been possible without the organizations that welcomed the project into their communities.

Nothing is virtual about violence when it's on your block or in your neighborhood. From feeling unsafe and fearful to mourning slain children, chronic violence causes suffering and hardship. TTR sculptures give artistic form to ideas about peace and nonviolence and offer aesthetic experiences of these ideas. Communities used the project as a vehicle for children and adults to express feelings about painful experiences and envision new ways of being.

Viewers report the TTR sculptures evoke feelings of calm, peace, and well-being. One community worker said students told him that “walking past the TTR sculpture to get to classes had a calming effect on them.” An art teacher said that one student whose pregnant mother was killed by gun violence found the Buddha reminded him of her, “calm and peaceful.” An artist working with elementary school students recounted how the “group discussed ways to approach the Buddha sculpture as a symbol of peace and a platform for discussion. Guided



by the belief that art starts from an idea, they explored concepts of contemplation and aggression.”

TTR communities responded enthusiastically and imaginatively to the invitation to use the sculpture and artistic thinking to trigger creativity. For example, one community organized a Love Train for Peace parade; another offered a bike tour of local sculptures. Schools got involved, asking for sculptures to promote peace and incorporating TTR into art classes. Other communities used sculptures as stopping points in a

peace procession or made plans to place them in vacant lots, creating Peace Parks.

TTR doesn't naively propose that art is a one-stop solution to violence and poverty. Instead, it shows how artistic thinking and creativity can clarify problems and contribute to solutions. In the words of one community leader: “The impact of Ten Thousand Ripples is invaluable. We have experienced ripple effects of creativity and community engagement. Our youth have written and performed plays about searching for peace, our seniors have been dancing in the streets for peace, and our community gardener has been driving around with a Buddha sculpture on his truck, educating the community about what we are doing for peace.” The ripple effects of using art to open eyes and minds will continue to spread across TTR communities long after the last sculpture fades from sight.

## INDIRA FREITAS JOHNSON

### LEAD ARTIST

Award winning artist Indira Freitas Johnson has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally. She is represented in numerous major private and public collections most notably the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Asian American Art Centre, New York, NY, City of Evanston, Evanston, IL, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence RI, and the Loyola University Museum of Art, Chicago, IL. The recipient of numerous grants and awards Johnson has been involved in many innovative community art projects and exhibits which have provided a voice for groups that are seldom heard from in the world of professional art exhibitions. You can learn more about her work at [www.indirajohnson.com](http://www.indirajohnson.com).

### CHANGING WORLDS, LEAD PARTNER ORGANIZATION

Changing Worlds is proud to serve as the lead agency for Ten Thousand Ripples, and work in partnership with artist Indira Johnson and community organizations in nine Chicago-area neighborhoods.

Changing Worlds is an educational art 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.

For over 15 years, Changing Worlds has worked towards its mission through separate yet interconnected program areas that include in-school and after-school partnerships; teacher professional develop workshops, seminars, and institutes; and community outreach initiatives such as traveling exhibits, short-term programs, collaborative partnerships, and special events. To learn more, visit [www.changingworlds.org](http://www.changingworlds.org).

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## COMMUNITY IMPACT MAP CHICAGO AREA COMMUNITIES



ALBANY PARK  
BACK OF THE YARDS  
EVANSTON  
LITTLE VILLAGE  
NORTH LAWDALE  
PILSEN  
RODGERS PARK  
SOUTH CHICAGO  
UPTOWN





*I witnessed how these sculptures were making an impact in Pilsen. I wanted to bring that impact to the Back of the Yards neighborhood... We are grateful to have an icon that can promote peace.*

- ADELFO GARCIA, PRINCIPAL, HEDGES SCHOOL

*The children were compelled to not only see the beauty of the form, but to experience it tactilely as well--feeling the cool, smooth, yet hard surface, while tracing the contours. Some children, reacting to the peacefulness of the image, shared their feelings by hugging the sculpture.*

- HOLLY HUTTO, DIRECTOR, GLOBAL EXPLORERS KIDS

*I like the project because I learned that peace comes from your heart and that peace means calm.*

- AZARIEAE MARTIN, 5-YEAR-OLD, HEDGES SCHOOL

*Ten Thousand Ripples is a conversation starter about what it means to have art in public spaces, art that promotes peace and serenity.*

- 22 WARD ALDERMAN RICARDO MUÑOZ



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