



Unity Through Creativity

Peacebuilding through Art Inspired by Nature

MILESTONES 2024

Celebrating the Year: Fourteen Singing Tree® Murals and More

Creating connection from human being to human being, fostering joy and enthusiasm for life, meeting challenges together with objectivity and compassion: these are the aims of the Unity Through Creativity Foundation. What does it take for people to feel safe with each other, to want the best for each other, to put the lives of others on par with their own? How can we welcome challenges and heartbreaks as opportunities to grow together as communities and individuals? These questions are foremost in our thinking as we continue to develop our programming, and in particular the Singing Tree® Mural Project, which has been our focus for the last few years. This past year has brought us opportunities to share our work with many communities, and we are delighted to share the fruits of those efforts with you.



- 1,568 youth, adults and elders from 17 countries participated in creating 14 Singing Tree® murals and two other collaborative works of art.
- 17 organizations and 140 people attended the International Day of Peace Symposium at University of Texas at El Paso.
- UTC led the initiative for the City Council of El Paso to pass a proclamation for El Paso to become an International City of Peace, joining 422 other cities around the world. The County of El Paso had passed a similar resolution a year earlier, led by UTC.



The Singing Tree of Reproductive Freedom that Restores Mother Earth

In three days, 55 youth and adults at the Bioneers Conference in Berkeley, California, co-created this 8'x4' mural. When asked "What breaks your heart?", the youth overwhelmingly listed three heart-breaks: denial of reproductive freedom, land/habitat destruction, and climate injustice.

Facilitated by Laurie Marshall, Bobbie Rae Jones, Leslie Rein, Fernanda Lugo, and Sweta Chawla



The Singing Tree of a Just and Democratic Economy

The mural explored how financial exchanges can be grounded in natural reciprocity, democracy and justice. Co-creating this mural on-line was an opportunity for 18 people from Alliance for Just Money to learn about the generosity of trees, crows offering gifts, and the collaboration of hermit crabs. It was part of the May Day for Money march in Chicago. Facilitated by Fernanda Lugo



*Connecting Human Being with Human Being
Fostering Joy and Enthusiasm for Life
Nurturing Compassion through Shared Creativity
This is What We Do*



The Mesquite Party for the Planet Singing Tree

Partially funded by Eco-El Paso and the El Paso Rotary Club, the painting brings attention to the eco-system of the desert. 327 people contributed to the mural which is exhibited at the El Paso Zoo. The painting also raises awareness of the need to preserve the 372-acre Rio Bosque wetlands, nurtured for 20 years by the University of Texas in El Paso. Facilitated by Laurie Marshall



The Northwest Roanoke Oak Singing Tree of Resiliency

This painting was created by 15 students from Da Humble Beez youth arts program in Roanoke, Virginia in partnership with the Hope Center. The work of the mural elevated asset-based love of place through the arts in an urban heat island due to years of redlining, disinvestment and being underserved.



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Facilitated by Jane Gabrielle



The Willow Singing Tree of Trust

The Willow Singing Tree of Trust was led by 21 eighth graders of Albany Middle School, Albany, California. They chose the theme of "Trust" as the most important element to heal the heartbreak around them. The students primed and built the frames and boards, gridded, painted the mural, and made leaves for their classmates to add their messages of trust. A total of 278 people contributed to the painting. Facilitated by Dr. Sweta Chawla

"In the beginning, when I started painting, I felt like I was going to mess up, so I didn't try. But then my friends said 'You should try more,' and I really got involved. I had fun and really enjoyed myself." – Baneet





The Azbil Singing Tree of Innovative Technology Based in Love

Twenty-six managers, engineers, marketers, and trainers from Japan, Singapore, and the U.S. came together for a three-day team-building program in Silicon Valley, California. The driving question was “How can AI, the cloud, and wireless technology be used to support the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals?” Working with the Azbil Group has been a significant development in UTC’s corporate training program.

“I want to cherish the connections I made this time as I work towards my work. This was the most amazing experience of my life.” – Risa Matsuda

Facilitated by Wanda Whitaker, Edward Schuldt, Laurie Marshall, and Lili Lopez



The Singing Tree of Ms. Rivera

Ms. Maya Rivera, 33, was a 4th grade teacher at Monterrey Elementary School in Roswell, New Mexico. She lived a beautiful life that ended much too early. Tamra Gedde, head of Roswell’s Creative Learning Center, responded immediately to the untimely loss of Ms. Rivera by facilitating a Singing Tree mural as a tribute to the beloved educator. 81 students and staff had the opportunity to celebrate Ms. Rivera’s life and grieve together. *“The process just works!” – Tamra Gedde, Facilitator*



The Vitex Singing Tree of Healing Relationship with Self, Earth, Others, and the Divine

This mural began as the imagery for Co-Heart 8 of Singing Tree Facilitators. The member of this co-heart are in Florida, Illinois, California, Texas and Zambia. 212 people contributed to the painting that was created in conjunction with the anniversary of the United Nation’s International Day of Peace Symposium held at the University of Texas at El Paso on Sept. 21st, 2024.

“It was one of the best days of my life.”

– Nico Silva



The Kyangwali Singing Tree of Healing the Trauma of War

This mural was made with refugees from the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Kenya living in the Kyangwali Refugee Settlement in Uganda. Facilitated by Emma Kavuma and Kanizius Nsabimana.

The fact that this mural has come about is a testament to patience and persistence: four years elapsed before we were able to secure the funding for the project.



The Cyprus Singing Tree of Becoming

This project brought together UTC and Cyprus-based Visual Voices for the second Cyprus mural project. Funding permitted us to award stipends to eight Singing Tree® Fellows (some pictured below), artists and activists from the north and south of the island. The Fellows executed the design and led groups totaling 200 people in creating leaves, birds, and stars expressing their vision of becoming on Cyprus, including refugees from around the world to whom Cyprus has opened its doors.



Our thanks to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus for providing space in the Buffer Zone to mount the mural.

Facilitated by Dr. Katia Petersen, Edward Schuldt, and Laurie Marshall



The Kenyan Singing Tree of Hope That Through All Her Pain, the Motherland Will Continue to Support Life



162 people contributed including the Makuru Collective, St. Paul School, and Kakenya's Dream in Kenya with educators from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This project was organized by Dr. Maureen Porter of the University of Pittsburgh through a Fulbright Grant.

"How amazing is it that I am helping with a painting that began halfway around the world? How cool is it that we are sharing problems and solutions and even paint with people we have not met but would be our friends?" said Maddie Movshin. She is one of 50 students at Darby High School in Hilliard, Ohio, who added to the mural during the time it was in the United States.

Facilitated by Nanci Goldberg, Detria Dixon, Erica Shadowsong, Nina Unitas, Ashanti York, and Beth Boza.

The Cottonwood Singing Tree of Tapping the Aquifer of Goodwill Amidst the Storm



This 8'x4' mural was prepared for the American Folklore Society Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. People added images of goodwill on the leaves. The release of 75 bighorn sheep in El Paso's Franklin Mountains is also celebrated. Facilitated by Laurie Marshall.

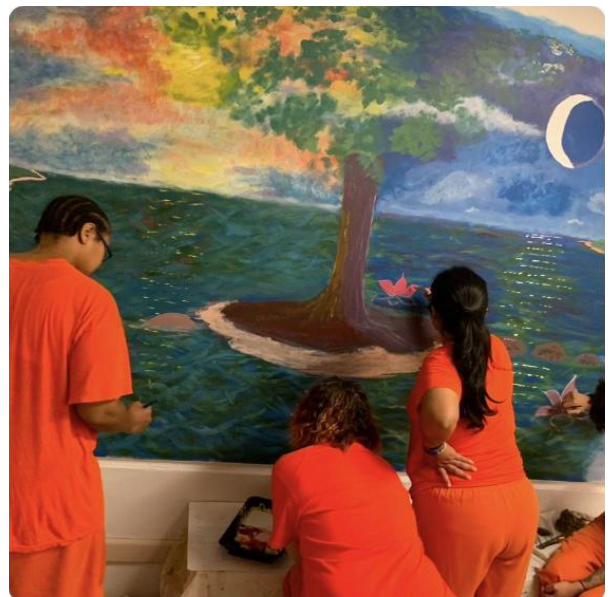


The Singing Tree of Balance, Peace and Freedom

This mural was painted at the Kane County Women's Jail in Illinois. By the end of this project, each woman had found courage in her painting and in expressing herself, as well as feeling seen, heard, and respected by others.



Facilitated by Kathleen Brigidina.



Other UTC Community Art Projects

Lighting the Way

This 10'x12' mural was co-designed and painted on the wall of one of the male inmate pods at the Kane County Jail in Illinois. This image allowed the men to see the best in themselves. Facilitated by Kathleen Brigidina.



Crows with a Cause

This piece features a crow and nest crafted from painted plastic bottles and upcycled materials. It highlights the legacy of plastic pollution. Participants were invited to weave their commitments to creating a better future into the nest using upcycled fabric strips.

Facilitated by Carrie Ziegler in Olympia, Washington.



NEWLY CERTIFIED SINGING TREE® FACILITATORS!



We are delighted to celebrate Kathleen Brigidina (Chicago, IL), Fernanda Lugo (El Paso, TX), and Carrie Ziegler (Olympia, WA) as fully certified Singing Tree® Facilitators!

EL PASO INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE: OUR SIGNATURE EVENT
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE SYMPOSIUM, EL PASO 2024

137 people gathered at the University of Texas El Paso, joining over 5,000 celebrations in the United States and 55 million people around the globe for the United Nation's Day of Peace.

"You're making peace just by walking in Beauty." – Grandma Bea



"Peace cannot exist without conflict. The question is: Is it going to be violent conflict or productive conflict?" – Devon Peña



"If we really are serious about building peace, building relationships, and creating 'The Beloved Community,' we need to drop our biases. We need to form those relationships. We need to build those bridges. Or in politics, as they say, we need to reach across the aisle." – Stephen Niamke



"When I was in West Point, I realized that soldiers receive excellent training in waging war, but most people receive no training in waging peace." – former Army captain Paul K. Chappell

A full report of the Symposium is available at <https://www.unitythroughcreativity.org/peace-day-2024>