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Mandalas, Tortoises and Children Captivate The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge During Their July 10th Visit to Inner-City Arts

The Royal Couple Makes Art with Local Children from Skid Row

Los Angeles, Calif. -- One hundred and twenty-five students from Frank del Olmo Elementary School received the royal treatment today when they had the opportunity to make art at Inner-City Arts with The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Prince William and his bride Catherine Middleton.

After touring the Skid Row area of downtown Los Angeles -- known as the homeless capital of the world due to its missions, homeless population, transient hotels and SRO (single room occupancy) housing units -- with Inner-City Arts President and CEO Cynthia Harnisch, Their Royal Highnesses, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, arrived at Inner-City Arts' campus, often described as an oasis of learning, creativity and achievement.

Harnisch had set the stage for The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, describing to them the children that they would meet and showing them the heart of the Skid Row District around 6th and San Pedro Streets. From Harnisch they learned about the recession-driven influx of single mothers to the Skid Row neighborhoods, and the challenges of poverty and homelessness faced by many of the students at Inner-City Arts. "Inner-City Arts was founded on the principle that as a community and as a culture, we are only as strong, viable and creative as our least privileged child," Harnisch told them.

Upon arrival at Inner-City Arts, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were greeted by 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students who held up a banner that said, "Welcome to Inner-City Arts."

Sneh Chachra, 10, then escorted The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to The Rosenthal Theater to meet Kenneth Chancey, a studio assistant at Inner-City Arts who shared his story about overcoming the challenges of poverty and homelessness in Los Angeles. Chancey, 19, who suffered abuse as a child and experienced periods of homelessness into his late teens, first came to Inner-City Arts as a high school student, and now works with the organization's

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teaching artists and students in the arts programs. “With support from organizations like Inner-City Arts, I’ve been given a chance -- a chance to succeed and to do something meaningful with my life,” he told them. “Not only did I graduate from high school with honors, but I was recently accepted to Loyola Marymount University. With every paint bucket, every pound of clay, every rubber band, Inner-City Arts changes kids’ lives in a positive way.”

Moving through the campus, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge observed Inner-City Arts’ studios filled with students and then entered the Visual Arts Studio. There Inner-City Arts’ co-founder Bob Bates and teaching artist Eva Perez were working with 20 5th grade students creating mandalas. Mandala, an ancient type of drawing, means “center” in the Indian language of Sanskrit. A mandala begins in the center of the page and the design grows to the outer edges of the drawing surface.

As The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge donned art smocks and took their places at easels, Bates explained, “Mandalas represent a perfect art form for Inner-City Arts. Our children reach down deep within themselves to express feelings with shapes and colors, and eventually a beautiful pattern emerges that reflects an inspired portrait of their universe.” Seated in a round of four easels, with one student on each side of them, escort Sebastian Lee, 9, and his classmate Nikki Aguilar, 10, explained to The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge how to paint their own mandalas.

Next The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were escorted to the Inner-City Arts W.M. Keck Foundation Ceramics Complex by 5th grader Joshua Valdivieso, 10, where 3rd and 5th grade students were gathered around tables working on separate parts of one giant tortoise. The Duchess joined students who were creating the tortoise’s shell. The Duke sat at another table, where a tortoise body was taking shape, as Jeysy Aguilar, 8, instructed him. Following the visit, the clay tortoises will be fired in the studio’s kilns and then placed in the campus cactus garden.

Before departing the ceramics studio, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge left their handprints and signatures in slabs of clay. These tiles will be glazed by students, fired in the kilns and then installed on one of the campus walls. The giant tortoise and handprints will be in place for Summer on 7th, Inner-City Arts’ fundraising party on July 30th.

The couple’s final stop was at the performing arts complex, where the Inner-City Arts Repertory Dance Company, comprised of 16 inner-city high school students from neighboring schools all located within a five-mile radius of Inner-City Arts (Roosevelt, Central High #9, Los Angeles High School for the Arts, Young Oak Kim Academy, Los Angeles Academy of Arts & Enterprises, and Jefferson High Schools) awaited their arrival. As The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge sat among the 125 Frank del Olmo Elementary School children, the dancers performed two original pieces for the couple, as well as several invited guests and city officials. The first was a high-energy 7 ½-minute montage of dance styles that included salsa, merengue, hip hop and Afro-Cuban, choreographed just for this special occasion. The second was a poignant piece entitled “If You’re Out There,” that included a video backdrop projecting dramatic images of the surrounding neighborhood, homelessness, and children from around the world. Enthusiastic applause followed the performance.

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When asked what this performance meant to her, dancer Jessica Cornejo, 19, said, “We had the opportunity to break down stereotypes about who inner-city kids are to two of the most famous people in the world. We want them to understand that we have something important to say and can contribute to the world. This is a social movement going on here. We all need art in our lives to dream, to grow, to live.”

After The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge ascended the stairs to their car, the children from the ceramics studio presented them with two miniature ceramic tortoises they had created the week before —replicas of the collaborative project they had all worked on together just half an hour before. As the children waved goodbye, they hoped that their gift of the turtles would make their way back to England and be treasured by The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, just as their own artwork is treasured by them.

During the visit, Inner-City Arts connected with Centrepoin from the UK, one of The Duke’s patronages and the leading charity for homeless young people aged 16-25. The British Council in LA, with the support of the Embassy and Consulate-General, is also exploring ways of deepening the links between the UK and US charitable sector in this regard.

Inner-City Arts tweeted the events of the day as they happened live @InnerCityArts. For a recap in photos, visit www.inner-cityarts.org.

About Inner-City Arts

Inner-City Arts, a non-profit arts education center, is a learning oasis in the heart of Los Angeles’ Skid Row where professional artists teach students in a real studio environment. Founded in 1989, Inner-City Arts has served 150,000 of the city’s most at-risk children at no cost to the students. With a campus that is an award-winning architectural marvel, Inner-City Arts works in partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District to bring elementary and middle school students to the campus during the school day for instruction in the visual and performing arts. High school students participate in after-school and Saturday programs. National, long-term research proves that students who attend Inner-City Arts’ classes show dramatic increases in statewide standardized test scores: 25% in math, 18% in reading, 8% in English proficiency. They also learn skills that are highly valued in the 21st century workforce such as collaboration, and creative and conceptual thinking. Most importantly, students who receive education in the arts are able to create a whole new vision of self- a new world of hope that includes accomplishment and belonging.

For more information, visit www.inner-cityarts.org

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