

## **The 2012 Raven Award for Excellence in Arts and Entertainment**

*The Creativity of Nonviolence* by founder, Suzanne Ross

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are gathered here tonight because violence is boring. You might well object, and at the Raven Foundation we are fully aware that violence can be riveting, full of flashy explosions, gunfire and bloodshed, hardly the stuff that gets us yawning. But at Raven we also know that all that excitement is like a magician's misdirection to divert our attention from what's really happening. Because if you look passed the drama, what you find is mindlessly repetitive behavior that leads nowhere. Violence is an unimaginative game that has one simple rule: return violence for violence. Adversaries become mirror images of each other – You attack me, I attack you ad infinitum, and the only end in sight is your destruction or mine. So, what do you call a drama with unoriginal characters and a predictable ending? Boring!

Now I think you'll understand why when I first met Indira earlier this year and she equated creativity with nonviolence, I knew I had found this year's Raven Award winner. Violence is way too boring a game for the likes of Indira Johnson! Her vision for Ten Thousand Ripples is rooted in the ancient wisdom that the game of peace is the opposite of boring! It is endlessly creative and genuinely surprising – as surprising as stumbling across a Buddha head in a vacant lot or under an El track.

Indira comes to her approach to peacemaking from her parent's commitment to the arts, social service and Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent movement Satyagraha. At Raven we start in the social sciences with mimetic theory, but we arrive at the same place as Indira. Our mission is to use the insights of mimetic theory in our weekly blog posts about current events, politics and religion to illuminate the futility of violence and the creative freedom of nonviolence. Each year we offer an award to an artist whose work best communicates these mimetic theory concepts. The Award comes with a \$5,000 prize that Indira is applying to support the curriculum development initiatives that are part of Ten Thousand Ripples. So it is the Raven Foundation's great pleasure to be honoring a truly exciting peacemaker, Indira Johnson, for 10,000 Ripples with the 2012 Raven Award for Excellence in Arts and Entertainment.

### **Remarks from Indira Johnson**

I am truly honored and humbled, to receive the Raven Award for Excellence in the Arts and Entertainment. When I first met Suzanne who came to visit me in my studio I felt an immediate kinship, as there was so much of an overlap in our philosophies on creativity, nonviolence and peace. The work that the Raven Foundation is doing to make violence

unthinkable and peace possible intertwines so beautifully with the goals of the Ten Thousand Ripples project. I am deeply grateful for this award

As an artist my passion has always been to make art part of everyday life, to involve local voices in the arts process and to cultivate peace as individual action. So the question for me was can public art act as a catalyst for conversations about peace and nonviolence, race and cultural understanding?

I had been using the image of an emerging Buddha in my own work as a symbol of peace for over a decade and had received so much positive feedback from this image. I wondered what the reaction would be if one saw an emerging Buddha head in an empty lot or at a bus shelter, along the 'L' tracks or in a street park? Would the element of surprise temporarily change how that space is perceived, charging it with a calming serene presence? Could this visually compelling sculpture with its odd juxtaposition on city streets become a catalyst for community conversations about peace and community building?

My original idea and vision for Ten Thousand Ripples has grown and blossomed over the last year and a half with the help and leadership of Changing Worlds, the lead arts organization, numerous individuals many of whom are here today, friends, family, advisory council members, funders and community partners. Our idea had been to provide neighborhoods with an intense and meaningful public art experience outside of traditional art venues, which would act as a catalyst for neighborhood issues, and concerns and this resonated with communities.

Ten Thousand Ripples has grown into a city wide public art and civic engagement endeavor. The ideas and vision of the ten participating communities have become embedded into the fabric of the project expanding its vision and making it much more far reaching in its impact. We have all been inspired by the dedication and commitment of our community partners. They have worked tirelessly to introduce the project to different segments of their communities to listen and provide a safe space for dialog. Five communities; South Chicago, Pilsen, Albany Park, Uptown and Rogers Park will participate in the fall and the other five North Lawndale, Auburn Gresham, Little Village, Back of the Yards and Evanston in the Spring.

Ten Thousand Ripples follows the call and response tradition. The sculptures will be installed during these next 2 weeks in sites chosen by the communities. There will be 10 in each of the five communities followed by each community's response. The shape of

Ten Thousand Ripples will change in each community depending on the needs and ideas generated by its residents who include artists, business folks, educational and community leaders.

Some have chosen to focus on safety, involving the youth and other violence prevention organizations like Cease Fire. Others have focused on inter faith dialog and cultural understanding, with the participation of the faith communities in their neighborhoods. Arts based events will range from spontaneous happenings like block club parties and line dancing to 8-10 week school or community based arts residencies and will include focused dialogs between diverse groups.

The concluding event will take place In August of 2013 when LUMA will host an exhibition of sculptures and work from the ten communities.