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Mural Unveiling in Brownsville

Young Men Reimagine Male Identity Through Monumental Brownsville Mural

Mural Dedication Ceremony: Thursday, August 30 at 11am
Location: 512 Rockaway Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11212

NEW YORK, NY - Groundswell, in partnership with the Brownsville Community Justice Center and Student Farm Project, is pleased to announce a dedication ceremony to celebrate the unveiling of “Yesterday I was ____, Today I am ____, Tomorrow I will be ____.”, a new public mural that inspires affirmation of one’s individual and communal identities without ignoring the challenging day-to-day reality of many Brownsville residents, particularly that of young black and Latino men.

This summer, ten youth artists participating in Making His’tory, a men’s leadership development program, collaborated with artists Chris Soria and Jules Joseph to research, design, and fabricate this 32 ft wide by 27 ft high mural as part of Groundswell’s Summer Leadership Institute (SLI).

Responding to the topic of "the male identity, stereotypes, and role models," Groundswell's Making His'tory mural team chose to deliver a message to Brownsville that considers the past, present, and future of the community's identity, and requires its residents to join a continued conversation.

The justice system is not an abstraction for Brownsville residents. Rather, it is a daily fact of life. *The New York Times* reports that an eight-block area in Brownsville has the highest concentration of police stops in the city, a rate 13 times higher than the city average. The imprisonment ratio for young men in Brownsville ages 16 to 24 is one in twelve.

Deliberately leaving its message incomplete, the all-male mural team addresses the topic of identity while leaving room for receptivity, reflection, and transformation. The text-based image reads, "Yesterday I was ____, today I am ____, tomorrow I'll be ____," a proclamation that is a statement and a question at the same time. It is bold and affirmative, yet beckons a response.

“We are moving away from the muralistic look to something more modern,” said youth muralist Emmanuel Knight. “We wanted to make something that will catch attention, and that’s when it came to us. Advertising. Everyone can associate with it. We are using the direct approach of advertising, but instead of selling, we offer. We give something back [to the community] that they already have in themselves.”

The slogan is accompanied by what the group of young men consider a symbol of personal identity - a hand - expanding the analogy to say "I know these streets like the back of my hand," to capture the identity of the community as well. The mural evokes a movie poster, conveying a story that continues to unfold. Underlying credits express qualities the youth artists would like to see more of in the community, each other, and themselves.

"Love. Courage. Strength. Faith. Dignity," said Groundswell Executive Director Amy Sananman. "These are the qualities our young artists aspire to, for themselves and for their community. Groundswell and our partners are honored to have helped provide these emerging leaders a highly visible platform to share this vision with a much broader audience."

"So often we don't ask men in our communities to talk about who they are and where they want to go. This mural will force people to ask themselves that question - a question that we can only hope will lead to action," said Brownsville Community Justice Center Project Director James Brodick.

About Groundswell

Groundswell brings together artists, youth, and community organizations to use art as a tool for social change. "Yesterday I was ____, Today I am ____, Tomorrow I will be ____." was completed as part of Groundswell's flagship program, the Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), which engages nearly 100 youth each summer as paid apprentices on mural projects that beautify neighborhoods and give voice to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented the public dialog. www.groundswellmural.org

About the Brownsville Community Justice Center

Founded as a public/private partnership between the New York State Unified Court System and the Fund for the City of New York, the Center for Court Innovation helps the justice system aid victims, reduce crime, strengthen neighborhoods, and improve public trust in justice. The Center for Court Innovation's latest project is the Brownsville Community Justice Center, which currently houses Brownsville's first youth court, where local young people are trained to serve as judges, jurors, and advocates, hearing actual cases referred by the police, probation, schools, and the courts, and the Brownsville Justice Community, which provides probationers and other justice-involved young adults with job training, educational services, and intensive case management. www.courtinnovation.org

About Student Farm Project

Student Project Farm transformed an empty lot in Brownsville into an urban teaching farm that beautifies the neighborhood, educates local youth, and provides a source of fresh produce for the community. Located at the corner of Sutter and Rockaway Avenue, the Student Project Farm is an 8,000 square foot corner lot that was once overrun with weeds and is now a beautiful garden. www.studentfarmproject.com

"Yesterday I was ____, Today I am ____, Tomorrow I will be ____." is made possible through the generous support of the David Rockefeller Fund, the Charles Lawrence Keith and Clara Miller Foundation, and the Center For Court Innovation and the Brownsville Community Justice Center through the Justice Community program of the Department of Probation, the Center For Economic Opportunity, and the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative. Major financial support for Groundswell's 2012 Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) is also contributed by Altman Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Brooklyn Community Foundation, Catalog for Giving, Edelman Community Investment, EILEEN FISHER, Ethel and W. George Kennedy Family Foundation, Irene B. Wolt Lifetime Trust, Lambent Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and its Cultural Innovation Fund, Travelers Foundation, Variety The Children's Charity, and Winifred Johnson Clive Foundation, in addition to numerous individuals.

SLI is made possible in part by public funds administered by the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Department

of Education, and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Summer Youth Employment Program.

Groundswell is grateful to the Office of the Mayor of New York City; the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President; and New York City Council Members Sara M. Gonzalez, Letitia James, Brad Lander, Stephen Levin, and Darlene Mealy.

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