



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mural Unveiling in Harlem

Youth Bridge Intergenerational Divide Through New Harlem Mural

Mural Dedication: Wednesday, August 31 at 1 pm
210 West 131st Street, New York, NY 10027

HARLEM, MANHATTAN – In Harlem, a team of young artists engaged local elders through the creation of a mural that has transformed the entrance to the Saint Nicholas Houses Senior Citizens Center. Their mural brought together different generations to inspire new perspectives on technology, community engagement, and youth activism. This mural is the third and final community mural in a series created with the nonprofit **Groundswell** to recognize the rich history of the Saint Nicholas Houses.

The mural, entitled “**Bridges**,” will be unveiled at a dedication on Wednesday, August 31 at 1 pm.

The youth artists worked as part of Groundswell’s two-month long flagship summer youth employment program, the *Summer Leadership Institute*, presented in collaboration with the **Saint Nicholas Tenant Association, New York City Council Member Ritchie Torres, and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)**. In lessons facilitated by **Lead Artist Jose de Jesus Rodriguez** and **Assistant Artist Marina Perez-Wong**, the young artists researched, designed, and fabricated the mural.

This mural is part of Groundswell’s larger “Public Art / Public Housing” Initiative, in which five developments identified from the Mayor’s Action Plan (MAP) for Neighborhood Safety, one in each of the five boroughs, have co-created three mural projects, for a total of 15 new public artworks throughout the city.

The design uses architectural elements of the exist wall—such as windows, vents, and staircases—to break-up the composition of the mural, and to introduce new narratives. From the team’s research phase, the youth artists found four common threads in the conversations they had with members of the community: technology, respect, recreational activities, and comfort zones. These keys words influenced their choice to center the mural on public communal spaces, such as parks and gardens. Both young and old are seen interacting in harmony and respect. Hands reach out for one another throughout the mural, to further emphasis connectivity between generations. Throughout the mural, children play games which have been played for decades, uniting the community of Saint Nicholas across time.

“Groundswell’s programs, including the *Summer Leadership Institute* and the ‘Public Art / Public Housing’ Initiative, which engages youth in public housing, have resulted in astonishing murals throughout the City depicting themes of social justice and equality. They truly are inspirational and will leave a lasting impact on public housing developments. Groundswell and the City Council have

had a successful collaborative relationship to lift up public housing residents and the results will now be visible throughout the City,” said **Council Member Ritchie Torres of the Bronx**.

“Thanks to the hard work and creativity of our young resident-artists, five developments across New York City are more beautiful than ever before,” said **NYCHA General Manager Michael Kelly**. “Vibrant public spaces like these give residents more reason to be proud of where they live – and NYCHA could not be prouder to share these works of art with all New Yorkers. With the leadership of Council Member Torres and the Groundswell team, our residents were able to tell their stories through painting – and those stories will live on at our developments for years to come, creating more connected NYCHA communities.”

“Throughout the creation of ‘Bridges,’ the young artists worked closely with elders to develop narratives, themes, and images for their design. The result of these dialogues is a series of lovingly rendered snapshots that capture the vitality of intergenerational mentorship and support at Saint Nicholas Houses. Elders and young people are brought together across these painted walls to play, learn from one another, and strengthen their community through social engagement,” said **Groundswell Interim Executive Director Rob Krulak**.

Through the mural-making process, the artist team became energized to become more involved in their communities. **Youth artist Samantha Pierre-Paul (17)** said, “I always knew there was a disconnect between the elderly and youth, but I didn't realize how big the gap was. I've become more connected with my own community. I speak to at least two elderly women regularly because I want to connect us better after finding out there was a separation. I'm more aware. This awareness makes me want to be a part of the community in a physical way, like showing up to community meetings, creating events, and so on.”

By using art as a tool for social change, Samantha and her fellow young artists will strengthen the bonds between different generations at Saint Nicholas Houses and will inspire future generations of leaders in Harlem.

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This project is made possible through the “Public Art / Public Housing” Initiative supported with funds from the New York City Council under the leadership of Council Member Ritchie Torres.

Major financial support for Groundswell's 2016 Summer Leadership Institute (SLI) is contributed by the Altman Foundation, Brooklyn Community Foundation, David Rockefeller Fund, Lambent Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, Sills Family Foundation, Slomo and Cindy Silvan Foundation, and Tikkun Olam 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 State Regional Economic Development Council, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Summer Youth Employment Program, the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity Work Progress Program, New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York City Council Member Brad Lander, and New York City Council Member Stephen Levin.

Groundswell is grateful to the Office of the Mayor of New York City.

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About Groundswell

Groundswell, New York City's leading organization dedicated to community public art, brings together youth, artists, and community partners, to make public art that advances social change, for a more just and equitable world. Our projects beautify neighborhoods, engage youth in societal and personal transformation, and give expression to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented in the public dialogue. www.groundswell.nyc

About Council Member Ritchie Torres

Council Member Ritchie Torres was elected to office in November 2013 to represent the 15th Council District in the Central Bronx. As Chair of the Council's Committee on Public Housing; Councilmember Torres oversees the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). NYCHA is the largest provider of affordable housing in New York and the largest provider of public housing in the United States.

Only a month into his Chairmanship, Council Member Torres held the first ever committee hearing at a public housing development. His historic oversight hearing played an important role in securing the largest FEMA grant in NYC's history: \$3 billion dollars for the repair and resiliency needs of NYCHA developments damaged by Superstorm Sandy. He also presided over the largest investment of City and State funds in NYCHA in over ten years, directing hundreds of millions of dollars towards vital repairs to the City's public housing stock.

About NYCHA

The New York City Housing Authority's mission is to increase opportunities for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing safe, affordable housing and facilitating access to social and community services. More than 400,000 New Yorkers reside in NYCHA's 328 public housing developments across the City's five boroughs. Another 235,000 receive subsidized rental assistance in private homes through the NYCHA-administered Section 8 Leased Housing Program.

To fulfill this mission and better serve residents while facing dramatic reductions in traditional government funding, NYCHA is developing new financing options and building innovative partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors. These strategies help NYCHA address many key challenges, from preserving aging housing stock through timely maintenance and modernization of buildings to increasing resident access to a multitude of community, educational, and recreational programs, and job readiness and training initiatives. www.nyc.gov/nycha