



Santa Barbara County Education Office

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***I Madonnari* Italian Street Painting Festival planned for May 26-28**

The *I Madonnari* Italian Street Painting Festival will celebrate its 32nd anniversary from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on May 26, 27, and 28 at the Santa Barbara Mission. A ceremony at noon on Monday, May 28, on the Mission steps will introduce and thank the major festival sponsors and featured artist Lysa Ashley as her street painting is concluded.

I Madonnari, the first festival of its kind in North America to present the performance art of street painting, is presented by and raises vital funding for the Children's Creative Project (CCP), a nonprofit arts education program of the Santa Barbara County Education Office.

"The *I Madonnari* festival is a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together," said County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Susan Salcido. "It speaks to the way our community values the arts. This festival is also an important fundraiser; the proceeds from this event directly supports arts education for more than 50,000 children in classrooms all around Santa Barbara County." she added.

The festival features 140 street paintings drawn with chalk pastels on the pavement in front of the Mission. As the public watches, 200 local artists transform these pavement canvases into elaborate compositions in unexpectedly vibrant colors. The spaces range in size from 4-by-6 feet to 12-by-12 feet and in price from \$150 to \$700, each one bearing the name of its sponsor — a business, organization, family, or individual. The festival is sponsored in part by The Berry Man, Loreto Plaza Shopping Center, Yardi, Daniel and Mandy Hochman, and Bella Vista Designs. The festival is grateful and thanks the Santa Barbara Mission for hosting *I Madonnari*. Members of the public can sign up at the festival's information booth to receive a brochure to be a street painting sponsor or an application to be an artist next year.

This year's featured artist, Lysa Ashley, is an artist and teacher from Corona, California. She has been street painting for 22 years and loves the performance aspect of the art form and enjoys interacting with spectators. People and animals are her favorite subjects; she is inspired by the emotions and personalities seen on faces. As a teacher, she enjoys the challenge of integrating visual art into the academic curriculum in order to motivate children in both learning and creativity.

An expanded area for children to create street paintings will be located at the west side of the Mission inside a private parking area. Some 600 Kids' Squares are available. When

completed, they will form a 40-by-60-foot patchwork of colorful paintings. Throughout the three-day event, the 2-by-2-foot Kids' Squares can be purchased for \$12, which includes a box of chalk.

Live music and an Italian market will be featured on the Mission lawn throughout the three-day event. The festival's *fabuloso* Italian Market offers authentic Italian cuisine produced by the Children's Creative Project Board of Directors. According to Board President Phil Morreale and Market Coordinator Bryan Kerner, this year's market will include lemon-rosemary roasted chicken, pasta, pizza, calamari, Italian sausage sandwiches, gelato, coffees, and specialty items designed from prior years' festivals including T-shirts, posters, note cards, and more. All proceeds from sales benefit the Children's Creative Project.

History

I Madonnari is produced by the Children's Creative Project (CCP), a nonprofit arts education program of the Santa Barbara County Education Office. The organization is the first to create a festival in North America featuring the art form of street painting. After traveling to a street painting competition in Grazie di Curtatone, Italy, CCP Executive Director Kathy Koury created the festival and the concept of sponsored street painting art as a fundraiser and produced the first local festival in 1987. The late Father Virgil Cordano and the Santa Barbara Mission's bicentennial committee members also worked with Koury to include the *I Madonnari* festival in the yearlong series of official events that celebrated the Santa Barbara Mission's bicentennial.

The festival has continued to grow and now is being replicated in more than 150 cities throughout the Western Hemisphere. In November 2017, five *I Madonnari* street painters — Delphine Louis-Anaya, Lysa Ashley, Ann Hefferman, Blair Looker, and Meredith Morin — traveled to Santa Barbara's sister city of Puerto Vallarta to create street paintings with local artists and children. Koury has continued to work with Santa Barbara and Puerto Vallarta Sister City representatives to further develop the festival that has taken place in the city's main plaza since 2006. The project is co-sponsored by the Santa Barbara-Puerto Vallarta Sister City Committee.

Street painting, using chalk as the medium, is an Italian tradition that is believed to have begun during the 16th century. Called "*Madonnari*" because of their practice of reproducing the image of the Madonna (Our Lady), the early Italian street painters were vagabonds who would arrive in small towns and villages for Catholic religious festivals and transform the streets and public squares into temporary galleries for their ephemeral works of art. With the first rains of the season, their paintings would be gone. Today, the tradition lives on in the village of Grazie di Curtatone, Italy, where the annual International Street Painting Competition is held in mid-August.

Festival proceeds enable the CCP to sponsor fine-arts programs conducted by professional artists during school hours for 50,000 children in county public schools. Resident artists provide workshops in the visual and performing arts for more than 38,000 children. Fundraising from the *I Madonnari* festival helps to continue the CCP's work to support free annual performance events and other activities.

On April 9 at the Santa Barbara Bowl, the CCP and the Bowl's Education Outreach co-presented two morning performances for 4,200 elementary schoolchildren who experienced Japanese drummers from the Taiko Center of Los Angeles. The *I Madonnari* Italian Street

Painting Festival, Santa Barbara Bowl, and a grant from the City of Santa Barbara and the Santa Barbara County Office of Arts and Culture funded the free performances.

During this school year 50,000 children at 90 school sites will view some 450 performances presented by multicultural touring companies featured in the CCP's Arts Catalog. To support this program, festival proceeds also provide every county public school with a \$200 arts credit to help pay the companies' performance fees.

For festival photos or more information about the Children's Creative Project or *I Madonnari*, or to arrange artist interviews, contact Koury at (805) 964-4710, ext. 4411, or go to imadonnarifestival.com. To interview featured artist Lysa Ashley, contact her at (951) 403-1886, or chlkgrl@yahoo.com.

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