



Santa Barbara County Education Office

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Susan C. Salcido, Superintendent of Schools

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PRESS RELEASE

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***I Madonnari* Italian Street Painting Festival planned for May 25-27**

The community will celebrate the 33rd anniversary of the *I Madonnari* Italian Street Painting Festival from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on May 25, 26, and 27 at the Old Mission Santa Barbara. A ceremony at noon on Monday, May 27, on the Mission steps will introduce and thank the major festival sponsors and featured artist Sharyn Chan 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.

"*I Madonnari* is a weekend of sharing colorful artwork in a beautiful setting for the benefit of arts education in our schools," said County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Susan Salcido. "The popularity and longevity of this event highlights how important arts are in this community. The proceeds of the *I Madonnari* festival directly support arts education for more than 50,000 children in classrooms all around Santa Barbara County."

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 Old 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, Sharyn Chan, is a unique blend of scientist, artist, hip-hop dancer/choreographer, and a motorcycle racer. A self-taught artist and student of her fellow street painters, she works traveling around the world as a street artist, solo, with friends, and as a part of various teams. She also works as a hip hop dance instructor and a government contract project manager. She was born to be an artist; drawing illustrations of rabbits and bears at age 3, but her career path took a different turn in college where she graduated with a computer science degree and stayed in that field for 30+ years. She dabbled in the artistic side of computers diving into Photoshop and graphic arts on the side, but, it was not until she met world-class street painters at the Santa Barbara *I Madonnari* Festival in 2001 that she learned about the ancient art form of street painting. Rekindling her passion for art, Sharyn began street painting in her hometown of Santa Barbara and has traveled all over the world participating in festivals and street painting to her heart's content. She has recently started mural work and commissions.

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 street 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 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 2018, four *I Madonnari* street painters — Sharyn Chan, Ann Hefferman, Rod Tryon, and Marlon Yanes — 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 8 at the Santa Barbara Bowl, the CCP and the Bowl’s Education Outreach co-presented two morning performances for 2,800 elementary schoolchildren who experienced The Alley Cats a *cappella* doo wop singers of Los Angeles with the UCSB Dance Company.

The *I Madonnari* Italian Street Painting Festival, Santa Barbara Bowl, and grants from The Towbes Foundation, 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 Sharyn Chan, contact her at 805-637-8447, or sharyn.chan@cox.net.