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INSPIRED BY THE CLAREMONT MUSEUM OF ART'S INAUGURAL KARL BENJAMIN EXHIBIT, CLAREMONT SCHOOLCHILDREN CREATE MASTERPIECES OF THEIR OWN

Claremont, CA (March 15, 2007)—For visitors coming to the Claremont Museum of Art on its April 15th opening day, the first artwork they see will not be the colorful paintings of world-famous artist Karl Benjamin or the exquisite pieces in the permanent collection, but rather 4 x 4 foot paintings hanging from the rafters in the Packing House corridor. The artists? Twenty-four students – in grades elementary through high school – from the Claremont public schools.

“The Museum is about to open, and our volunteers are already facilitating art workshops for students,” Museum Executive Director William Moreno said. “It illustrates the extraordinary commitment of our volunteers who are donating a significant amount of their personal time to bringing art into the community. The Museum is dedicated to reaching out to the community and involving children and young adults.”

When the Claremont Museum of Art opens, it will be a regional museum of international significance, exhibiting art connected to Claremont as well as art from around the world. Its inaugural exhibit, *A Conversation with Color: Karl Benjamin, Paintings 1953-1995*, will include 46 paintings spanning 42 years that trace Benjamin’s career, from his early experiments with cubism to works that represent his role as one of the founders of abstract classicism. The museum’s permanent collection, *Building a Legacy: Founding a Museum, Building a Collection*, will occupy the smaller of the two museum galleries with works exhibited by notable local artists on a rotating basis. In addition to a diverse slate of exhibits, the museum will feature a sizeable gift shop and a comprehensive line-up of educational programming and events.

Volunteer Marilyn O’Neill, co-chair of the Museum’s education committee, has been heading up the student art project since its inception last November. She started the process by contacting all Claremont Unified School District schools to get staff recommendations about students in grades 6–12 who would both benefit from participating in this project and rise to the artistic challenge. The 24 chosen students include two sixth graders from each of the seven elementary schools, three from the junior high, and seven from the high school.

“At our first meeting at the Alexander Hughes Center, we watched a video interview with Karl Benjamin that shows him at work in his studio and discussing his creative process,” O’Neill said. Afterwards, she and the student artists discussed non-objective art and ‘abstract classicism,’ for which Benjamin is famous. Focusing the student’s attention on a few significant works shown in the video, and on the concept of “taking one’s time” and “being intuitive,” the students were given notebooks and asked to “doodle” designs over the next week until they each had created several that “spoke” to them, she said.

“We met again the following week and laid out all the designs, from which each student chose their favorite,” O’Neill explained. “At that session, they began playing with color. Their work was then photographed.” With the help of her husband and daughter, O’Neill then projected and traced their designs onto prepared 4 x 4 foot Masonite surfaces.

Now in the final phase of the process – studio production – O’Neill and the students have been meeting every Saturday and Sunday since mid-February at Vista del Valle School from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Principal Ley Yeager generously donated the facility for the workshop’s use. Each student is hard at work on his or her own 4 x 4 ft. panel, using acrylics to paint both sides of the piece. Their sessions will complete by April 1. When finished, the artwork will be suspended from the beams of the Packing House promenade to coincide with the Museum’s opening.

O’Neill emphasized that the student works are not copies of Benjamin’s art but rather entirely individual pieces inspired by his creative process. “Students could be observed in lengthy and deep meditation of their canvas before they even wet a brush,” she said. “These artists have found their own voices through their designs, and have mixed their own colors for highly unique palates. They have followed the process by which Karl, a great teacher as well as great artist, goes about creating.”

About the Museum

The April 15 public opening will take place from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event will include free admission, live music, a street painter, and family art activities.

Museum hours will be Wednesday through Monday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It will be closed on Tuesday. The museum store will be open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. The museum and store will stay open until 8 p.m. the first Friday of every month and will be closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day.

Admission to the Museum will be free through May. Beginning June 1, admission will be \$3.00 for adults and free for those under 18.

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