



“Super Happy” Painters Holding Hands

The “Great Men of the World” mural at Magoso Primary School, completed in 2015

Artist Kensuke Miyazaki is best known for the murals he paints with children in developing countries around the world, a collaborative effort that began – and continues – at Magoso Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya.

TOSHIO MATSUBARA

KENSUKE Miyazaki studied art at the University of Tsukuba in Japan. After completing graduate school, he flew to London, where he did live improvised painting performances on the streets. During his time in

London he saw a documentary TV program about Magoso Primary School. Moved by the way children were eager to learn despite living in poverty, Miyazaki approached the school about his desire to paint murals on the school walls, hoping that his paintings would in some small way bring happiness to the children there.

Miyazaki began work on his first mural painting at Magoso Primary School in 2006, and this project proved to have a significant impact on his future art activities. The first thing Miyazaki painted were dragons on a school wall, an image that had proved very popular among

children when he painted one at an orphanage in the Philippines as a college student. However, rather than bringing them any joy, the dragon left the Kenyan children terribly frightened, with some of them even starting to cry. The painting became such a big issue that the teachers held a staff meeting to discuss it. Miyazaki quickly decided to redo the painting.

“I mistakenly selected a theme that I thought would be popular based on past experience. I realized that I needed to paint something local children love, otherwise all my work would be in vain,” says Miyazaki. “I asked



Artist Kensuke Miyazaki stands before one of his paintings in his studio.

them what they wanted me to paint, and they instantly requested things like the animals, plants, and vehicles they have in Kenya, so that's what I decided to depict. At first they watched me from a distance, but when they saw that I was painting things they like, they quickly formed a crowd around me."

As Miyazaki befriended the local children, they began to have fun lending a hand with the painting. He completed his work just before he had to leave the country, so everyone was able to share in the joy of finishing the mural.

"The mural is not my work, but the work of everyone. That's why everyone was so pleased," Miyazaki reflects. "This mural really helped to show me that art is not merely something that you create on your own."

Miyazaki's mural painting was a big hit at Magoso Primary School. He was later asked to come back to Kenya in 2010 when a new building was added to the school, and once again in 2015

when one of the school walls needed to be rebuilt following a fire in the slum. Each time he completed the new mural paintings together with children, just as he did during his first visit.

In 2015, Japanese children also took part in the project by creating their own original drawings. The children in the two countries interacted by sharing their paintings with each other over Skype.

Miyazaki has also launched a project in which pictures painted by Kenyan children are used on product packages, with a portion of the product sales in Japan being donated to local communities in Kenya.

"The basic concept of my paintings is 'super happy.' I only paint pictures that are totally positive, with the colors I use

being powerful primary colors. The people I paint always look straight ahead," says Miyazaki. "So, I believe the pictures we paint together possess a great deal of power. This is why I want to continue mural projects like these all over the world for the rest of my life."

Miyazaki created a team for a new world mural project called "Over the Wall." The project aims to create mural paintings in different countries and regions every year in an effort to actively encourage children to go beyond borders and connect with each other through painting. He is planning for a mural project at an orphanage in East Timor in August 2016 and one at an elementary school in Ghana in 2017. Miyazaki says he will continue painting wall murals that inspire children to dream. **7**



Miyazaki and Kenyan children work together on a mural.