

## COMMUNITY

# 'Universal language': Hudson, Kenyan students share artwork

Written By: Rebecca C. Mariscal | Aug 2nd 2019 - 9am. Published in *Rivertowns.net*



Liz

Malanaphy, kneeling, and students of the Children of Africa Hope Mission School in Nairobi, Kenya gather around the four-piece mural they painted. Malanaphy led Hudson students in a similar project last year, and brought a copy of their mural to the school in Nairobi. Submitted photo

The students gather around the large canvas pieces first thing in the morning, eager to put their brushes to the canvas.

The paint, of course, finds its way onto their hands and clothes as well as the piece they're working on. Their movements leave their marks on the canvas edges, footprints and drops of paint, so that they tell as much of a story like the paintings in the center.

They spend all day working. Even when a section seems to be done, the students return to it, adding more layers of paint onto the canvas, not wanting to stop.

"It was the most joyful day," said Liz Malanaphy of Hudson, who led the students of the Children of Africa Hope Mission School in Nairobi, Kenya in the project.

"When you look at the mural, there is so much more of a story than what's on it," she said.

The students were excited to make their own mural after they were presented with one made by four students in Hudson.

Liz Malanaphy led Katy Piehl, McKenna Nasvik, Sicily Tenant and Antonia Bower in creating a moving mural that depicted the St. Croix River at The Phipps Center for the Arts. The mural was featured around Hudson, and a copy of it made the trip to Nairobi.

Malanaphy delivered it herself, and then led the students in their own creation.

Malanaphy said she wanted to see what would happen when she took something that was engaging to kids here somewhere else. She discovered that it had the same impact.

"Art is sort of this really easy universal language," Malanaphy said.

The opportunity came about through a friend Malanaphy met in her early days of art. Malanaphy was doing the artwork for a book by this friend when she told her about the Center for Health and Hope and the Children of Africa Hope Mission School it supports in Nairobi.

"I just said that sounds like a really amazing school and effort," Malanaphy said.

Her friend told her to come along.

"Why wouldn't I?" Malanaphy said she thought.

She traveled to the school in early July. She and the students worked to develop a mural that reflected the environment around them, just as the four Hudson students had done with their St. Croix River project. While the Hudson mural has bald eagles, otters and ducks, the Nairobi mural has giraffes, mango trees and elephants.

"The contact and the relationship through art that we developed in one or two days was amazing," Malanaphy said.

The students don't have the same resources that many do in this country, but Malanaphy said they are joyful and grateful.

"It made me feel so much more responsible to do everything I can to help preserve what we have on this planet, in their world and in our world," Malanaphy said. "We really have to double our efforts because we have to do it for those kids, too."

Malanaphy also worked with a women's center run by Riruta United Women Empowerment Programme to paint signs for their new space. She brought back some of the products made by the women, and is looking for places to sell them.

The completed mural came home with Malanaphy. It will be displayed at The Phipps at a later date.

The young artists of the original Hudson mural were proud to know their work is now hanging in a school in Nairobi, Malanaphy said. And now, the work of those students will be hanging in The Phipps in Hudson.

"They were really excited about that," Malanaphy said.

The project came together with support from others. It was sponsored by Aaron Nelson, who also sponsored the original moving mural. Liesl Nelson traveled with Malanaphy, helping her at the school and the women's center. Steve Johnson took photos of the Hudson mural so it would be reproduced, and Minuteman Press did the reproduction that traveled to Nairobi.

Now, Malanaphy wants to do more.

Malanaphy said she would like to bring the traveling mural to other places as well, and work with kids in each place on their own art. She'd eventually like to bring kids along, but she knows that's a big thing to think about.

"There's so much good that could come of this," Malanaphy said.

To learn more, visit the Children of Africa Hope Mission School <https://www.centerforhealthandhope.org/children-of-africa-hope-mission-s...> or the Riruta United Women Empowerment Programme at [" target="\\_blank">ruwepo.org/](http://ruwepo.org/).