

PAINTING ICE CREAM SMILES

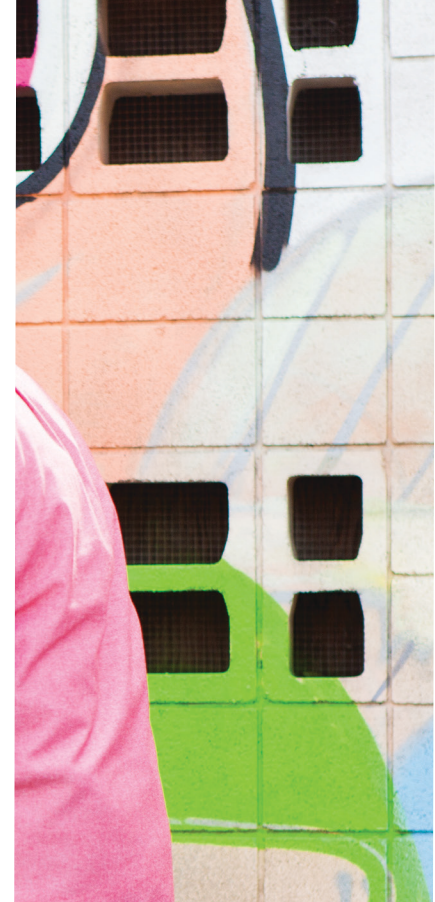
Creating a colorful
Vista Campus

“It doesn’t matter what kind of flavor you are, what makes us different is what makes us special.”

Warren Brand is living that motto with complete sincerity and encouraging the students at Vista Del Mar to share their own special flavors on a sun-filled Friday afternoon. An art curator and entrepreneur who heads Branded Arts, an organization that has produced and curated over 50 public murals around Los Angeles, Warren is helping Vista paint the campus in shades as vibrant as the students who study there. Through collaborations with nonprofits, Branded Arts creates pop-up art festivals that modify ordinary spaces by turning them into living public galleries. “We hope that this will set the tone for Vista, and help turn this campus into an art-centric place where it will pop as a colorful, cultural epicenter,” Warren says. Showcasing the transformative stories each Vista student has within a lively color palette, this mural will display how each student has truly blossomed.



Mural artist Buff Monster



On March 14, 2014, children at the Vista school gathered with Branded Arts to embark on a creative journey, painting a mural on Vista's campus—an opportunity for the students to display their stories. Sprawled out across the floor in the assembly room, students formed clusters with their friends, sharing colored pencils as they drew faces in outlines of ice cream cones and playful caricatures. Alyssa, a 4th grader, was ecstatic to discuss her feelings during the assembly as she drew spikey hair on an ice cream cone. "I like it because we can draw things and color things. I'm doing a rainbow-color ice cream because it's my favorite ice cream flavor," she says with a sparkling light in her eyes. An exuberant and poised nine-year old, Alyssa has been a Vista student for over a year and loves its wide range of opportunities, "I get to try new things all the time, and have fun with other kids and really nice teachers!"

Spearheading this artistic expedition are Gabè Hirsch, David Konheim, Michael Polier and Zach Zalben from the Leadership Council, a group of 25 to 45-year-old volunteers and council members who are on track to become the next generation of Vista's leadership. Most of its members are from families who have been supporters of Vista for years, and others have been inspired to join through word-of-mouth recommendations and community activities.

Warren Brand brought in the perfect fit for the Vista mural—renowned street artist Buff Monster. Finding his main influences in Japanese culture and ice cream, Buff Monster uses pink in almost everything he creates, drawing on its symbolism of self-confidence and individuality. Buff's body of work and artistic mindset couldn't

fit in more perfectly with Vista's philosophy that concentrates on the whole student; focusing not just on their academic well-being, but also their family, friends, and extracurricular ambitions.

During the assembly, kids drew faces that Buff Monster will incorporate into the mural. Over the next few weeks, students will assemble two more times to fill in the outlines on the mural wall with spray paint. Immortalizing the students' energy will be a daily reminder of their own unique potential. "Helping students build their own creative voice is my main goal, because today kids are losing their individuality," Warren says. The most incredible part about getting kids involved in art is that it gives them the opportunity to harness their creativity and embrace their soaring imaginations. This outpouring of self-expression truly reflects Vista's educational philosophy: one that seeks to expand their students' minds and spirits.

Another leader in this collective art project is Michael Polier, who has been a good friend of Warren's since high school and who had the idea for the mural. "This mural is going to give people ownership of their community. The students can say 'I made that,' and it takes them out of the bubble that they can be trapped in," explains Michael. This type of ownership can really build a child's self esteem; the notion of the "I" is a profound awakening for Vista students, igniting the fire inside of them that believes that they can achieve anything. Expressing themselves through an artistic mural that will live on—that's the magic of art that you just can't recreate on a piece of paper in a classroom. ■