



Mackay Elementary School students, from left, Claire Xin, Irene Lee, Megan He and Madeline Kim pose in front of the school's International Peace Day Project board. The students were recreating artwork by artist Takashi Murakami in celebration of this year's theme, **Recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world.** COURTESY OF TENAFLY SCHOOLS

Mackay students give peace - and flowers - a chance

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Each year, students at Mackay Elementary School in Tenafly celebrate the International Day of Peace with a unique school-wide project, but this year, with students and staff returning to a regular schedule after a year of hybrid teaching due to COVID, Principal Brenda Yoo and School Counselor Jennifer Angerson knew that this year's celebration had to be big.

"In past years, we've celebrated International Peace Day by making paper cranes, windmills, even self-portraits," said Yoo. "However, this year's theme, Recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world, blended well with what we were already celebrating, returning to our regular schedule with all the students present.

"We knew it was important to have the students celebrate."

Art teacher Kathleen Bracero decided on a project based on the work of artist Takashi Murakami. Students learned about the artist, his contributions to the art world, and his collaborations.

"Murakami and his work are great examples of collaboration and bringing honest and great energy into the arts for

public consumption in regular life," said Bracero. "In fact, many students recognized his work whether from seeing it around in places visited, on products, or from older siblings and family members."

Students in kindergarten to fifth-grade participated in the project, coloring flowers while learning about color value, gradients, blending, different coloring tools, and more. Each flower had a smiling earth surrounded by petals.

"I chose to do these flowers because I felt that they were a great representation of happiness with the center of the flower respecting our world," added Bracero. "I think that flowers make everyone smile and make us feel good."

The project, a giant peace sign made from the flowers and a board of smiling flowers, took three weeks to complete and is now on display in the school hallway. Students pose in front of the board, signing peace and celebrating their return to a normal school year.

"Yes, we are wearing masks and trying to maintain three-foot distances, but the students are just happy to be back. Back in school, back with friends, and back to doing the things they love to do. We are all truly "recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world."