

renegade

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 5

**48 RADICAL
ENTREPRENEURS**
FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE

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UNDISCOVERED**

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*Jessica
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IS WATCHING**

SHE'S PERFORMED FOR
OPRAH, ELLEN + OBAMA
+ TOURED WITH **BEYONCÉ**
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FASHION / DESIGN / FILM / FOOD / TECH / ART / SOCIAL CHANGE / TRAVEL

CREATING A CONNECTED PLANET

A BUNCH of ENTREPRENEURS from COLUMBIA to THAILAND are BRINGING KIDS from more than 30 countries TOGETHER to create ART that can INSPIRE the WORLD.

WORDS: FIONA MACDONALD

It's a regular Tuesday for the year 6 and 7 kids in Ms Sellig's art class in Huntington Beach, California — until the box arrives, that is. Wrapped up tightly with packing tape and stickers covered in Thai symbols, the usually distracted class is fixated on the parcel and, when they finally manage to get it open, its contents. Inside are hundreds of illustrations from the other side of the world, drawings of strange creatures and landscapes created by children living in Nong Pla Lai, Thailand.

Despite having never met their collaborators (or heard of their village before), Ms Sellig's class will create an animation using the drawings. Once they're finished, they'll send their videos off to Taganga, Colombia, where other 11- and 12-year-olds will add a soundtrack.

The final film, a collaboration of voices and life experiences from different pockets of the globe, will be fittingly exhibited in museums and galleries around the world.

This is all part of D.A.S (Drawing, Animation, Sound), one of the key projects run by Cre8 Foundation, an organisation that engages professional artists and children worldwide to



work together on collaborative artworks, and for Ole Ukena, the founder of Cre8, it's a glimpse at the future of creativity and connectivity. "We're giving kids the chance to be part of something bigger than themselves, to feel as though their creativity has made a difference," Ole explains.

Of course, every creative journey has its beginning. For these children it was the opening of a mysterious cardboard box in art class, but for Cre8 it was five years ago in northern India. Ole, a mixed-medium artist and avid traveller originally from Germany, was spending three months working with kids at an Indian orphanage to create an exhibition that would raise funds and awareness.

"In the end the whole village came to the exhibition — 400 or 500 people. The kids ran around super proud of what they did," he explains.

"It was just one of those 'aha' moments. Even though I'd already had exhibitions, that was by far the coolest one because you could feel the impact it had on the community." >





While travelling in the following months, Ole started telling like-minded people about the idea, and it grew organically. People from around the world wanted to get involved and use their skills to help change the lives of children, and the Cre8 Foundation was officially born. Its core team is now a collection of people from Germany, Colombia, Australia, Thailand and the US.

Now Cre8 has projects in almost a dozen countries (Ole has lost count) and there are musicians, writers, artists and coordinators delivering workshops across Europe, Asia and America. Everywhere they go, they're not only teaching kids to think creatively and have fun with art, but to collaborate and work with others — no matter where they live on the planet.

"Most of these kids will never have a chance to travel outside of their country, for financial reasons," explains Ole.

"We decided there's so much art out there already, why not focus on giving these kids the experience of working with professional artists and other kids, to be part of something much bigger? Once they finish the project they become like teammates with people in other countries."

In today's world, where we're increasingly wary of strangers, Ole says this experience can have a significant impact.

"One of the most rewarding things is seeing kids open up and trust others and their own intuition. After a while they start to teach children they've just met what they've learned. You have suddenly created an environment where they feel confident to pass something on," says Ole.

In addition to the short-term pride and confidence that the kids get, for Ole it's about trying to change the future generation's thought patterns and open them up to new possibilities.

And it's working.

Five years after the first exhibition in India, two of the kids from the orphanage Ole worked at are now enrolled in film school. He taught them how to hold their first camera.

"Of course not everyone that we work with is going to go



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be an artist, we don't want that," he says. "What we try to teach them is that they should feel this creativity, versatility and collaboration in anything they choose to do."

But despite the impact they're having on kids' lives, Ole doesn't see the work as 'giving back'. In fact, he feels the team of artists and coordinators involved, who span all continents, learn just as much as the children.

"It never started as charity or giving back. For me it's about engaging with my work and immersing myself into new cultures," says Ole.

"Every time I hang out with kids and do a workshop, I learn something about myself. Regular artists are in a studio or gallery, constantly surrounded by other artists, but at Cre8, I'm surrounded by 23 loud kids. I get instant feedback when something is or isn't working," he says.

"It's difficult and important for all of us, especially grown-ups, to let go of what we're working on and share. You immediately get something out of it by

putting yourself out there."

As well as D.A.S, Cre8 is also now running the 'most realistic alien' project, which gets kids to draw what they think an alien looks like, with no right or wrong answer. The result is a collection of beautifully creative drawings that reflect a moment in time and a child's background.

The pieces, gathered from kids of many countries, will also be displayed in exhibitions from Helsinki to Barcelona and Ole wants to eventually turn the series into a coffee table book that's updated each year. He hopes this united experience will bridge gaps between nations, languages and cultures.

"After the workshops, other countries aren't just places on the map to these kids," Ole explains.

"They're countries where other people have worked on the same project as them. Without talking about politics or spirituality, we've found a common link between the children — their creativity."

And he believes that's a shift that could one day change the world. "In the future, innovation is going to be about interconnectedness and harnessing the creative power of collaboration," he says.

"We're only just beginning to see the potential." ■