



THE STORY OF THE COMMON GROUND WORLD PROJECT

A LANDMARK SCULPTURE BY NEIL TETKOWSKI

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"Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend." ~Carl G. Jung

# THE COMMON GROUND WORLD PROJECT

## THE CONCEPT

At the heart of Neil Tetkowski's multi-faceted artistic undertaking is a singularly fascinating concept: collect clay and sand samples from all United Nations Member States, formulate them into a single "world clay", and create a landmark sculpture celebrating the interconnection of all human beings. This is an artwork with a remarkable story of collaboration.

## THE SCULPTURE

*The Common Ground World Mandala* was created on location at the United Nations. It is the only work ever made with the participation of people from every nation of the world. Created with a portion of earth from all Member States, the sculpture measures nine feet tall by seven feet wide (2.75 x 2.25 meters).

## THE UNITED NATIONS

Officially endorsed at the United Nations, former Under-Secretary General, Nitin Desai said, "this extraordinary work of art illustrates the spiritual and genetic thread that connects all people, tying us together with hope and inspiration." Tetkowski's Common Ground World Project was a sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts. The project was made possible with contributions from many supportive individuals and a grant from the Ford Foundation.

## THE ARTIST

"People from every nation participated equally in this project, and it is the first time earth from every country of the world has been blended together to symbolically dissolve national borders and boundaries. This process of collaboration with individuals in every nation of the world speaks to our collective need to recognize our connection to each other and to our environment".

~ Neil Tetkowski



People in 188 countries, strangers to each other, worked together. They were asked to dig up their clay and send it to New York. Above: Israel and Qatar



Young people from Tanzania were eager to be a part of this global project.

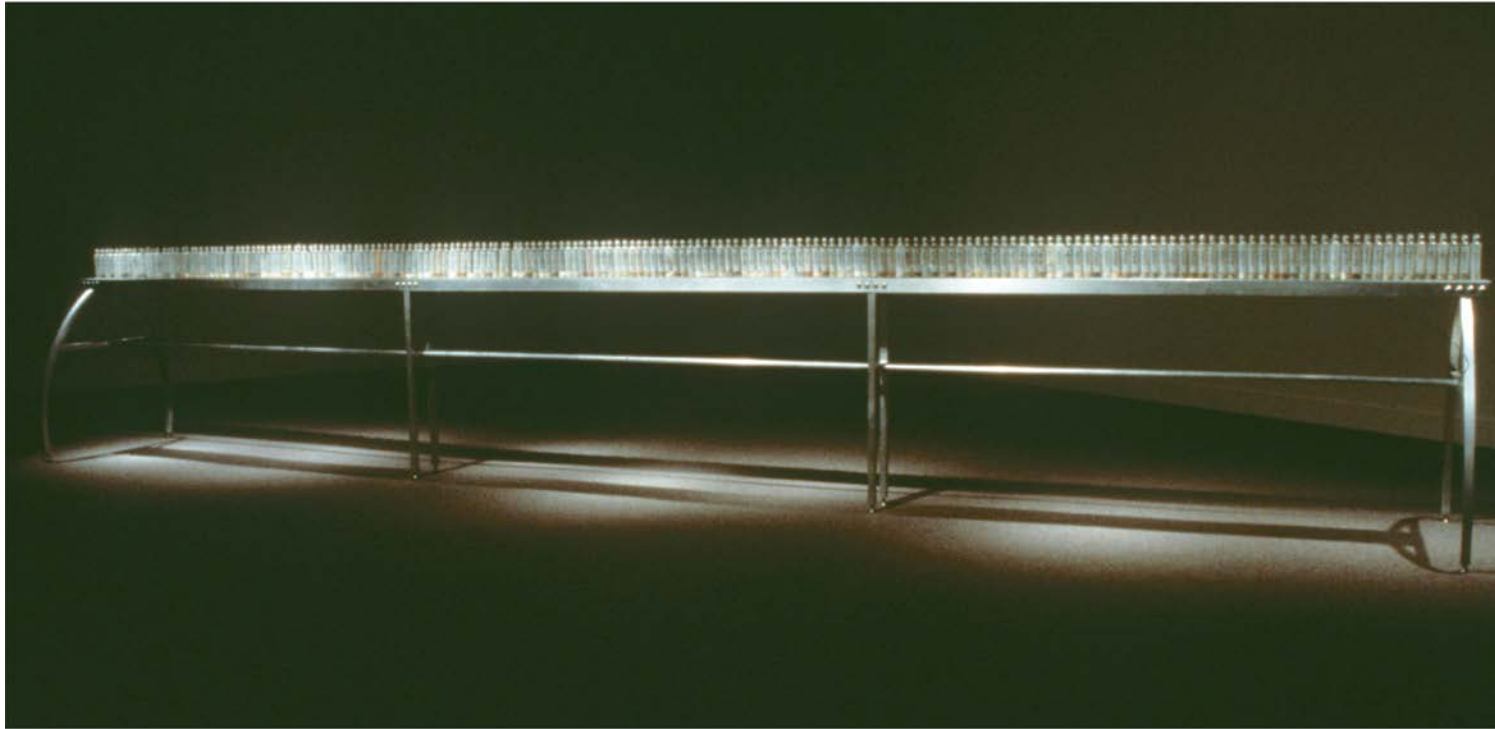


Through this collective activity the earth was transformed. Materials were blended to dissolve national borders and allude to a vision of unity.



For eighteen months packages from all over the world arrived in New York. By February 2000, all 188 samples were together in one place. This is clay from the Democratic Republic of Congo.





*Installation 188* measures 24' x 3.5' x 4' tall, ( 7.3 x 1 x 1.2 meters tall ).  
This work has been shown at the United Nations and at many museums.



The natural clay and sand range in color from red, blue, yellow, brown to black and white.

COMMON GROUND WORLD PROJECT  
CREATION EVENT April 2000 U.N. NYC



A REPRESENTATIVE OF EACH NATION WILL PLACE  
THEIR PRE-PROD CLAY INTO THE SOFT WORLD MANDALA

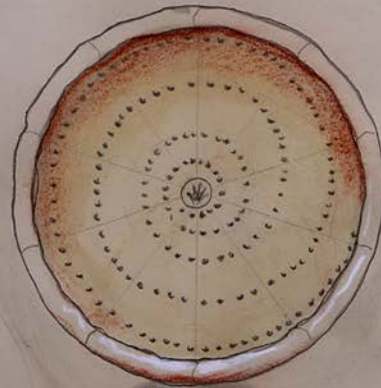
Before the world clay is mixed, each individual clay will be placed into a numbered container. All the containers will be placed in a numbered container.

COMMON GROUND WORLD MANDALA  
2002 - Final Installation

THEME OF INTERCONNECTION  
188 NATIONS

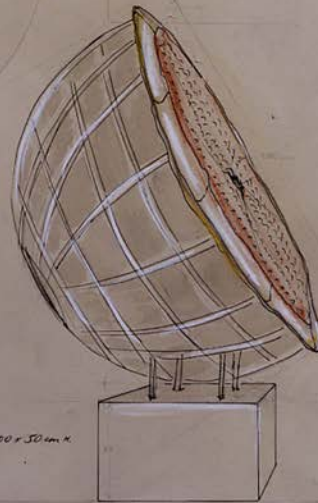
PORTRAIT OF THE WORLD  
Representing the Earth and  
All of its people  
All Cultures  
All Nations 2000

THEME OF ALL GENERATIONS



Actual size handprints 100 yr. old  
and infant -

2) ceramic tiles attached to the face  
of hemisphere structure



White Vermont marble pedestal 100 x 100 x 50 cm x

A SYMBOL OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP - YEAR 2000

*Handwritten signature*





At the United Nations in New York, 100 year-old Mary Livornese Cavalieri (1899-2008) made her hand print. One month-old Kelly Rose Tom then placed her little hand in the very center. Opposite: Kelly Rose Tom, 2010



Individuals from each country symbolically placed pieces of their fired earth into the growing spiral of world clay. After three weeks the work was ready to dry.







An aluminum structure was fabricated to support the heavy ceramic tiles.



The completed *Common Ground World Mandala* was unveiled at the United Nations in New York where the project originally began.



## THE FUTURE OF THE COMMON GROUND WORLD PROJECT

The completed project was originally intended to remain at the United Nations in New York where it was created and first exhibited. There it would embody the ideals of the United Nations and be visited daily by thousands of people from around the world. In 1998, that plan was accepted with the official United Nations endorsement and support from the Under-Secretary General of Economic and Social Affairs. For five years the project moved forward with that goal.

However, because of complex administrative issues at the United Nations, after 2002 the artwork did not remain there permanently. These unique circumstances present new and more open possibilities. The work is available for exhibition and was, for example, shown at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery Museum in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada in 2015.

There is also the special opportunity for a museum — to host the permanent exhibition of the *Common Ground World Mandala and Installation 188*, for the public to experience as originally intended. While years have passed since the project was completed, today this powerful work is more relevant and inspiring than ever.



## NEIL TETKOWSKI

Born in 1955, Neil Tetkowski's early years were spent in Siena, Italy, where he attended grammar school for several years. Both parents were in the arts and this provided an early foundation for what would become a lifetime passion for creativity, education and a fascination with diverse cultures of the world. Before his tenth birthday, he had crossed the Atlantic Ocean three times by ship and had visited museums and cultural landmarks in more than twenty countries.

Neil Tetkowski's material of choice comes directly from the Earth, and most often he uses clay, which he believes is the perfect medium to express his relationship to the natural environment. Since 1980 Tetkowski has exhibited his artwork in galleries and museums. He has a special interest in Asian culture and has had three solo exhibitions in Tokyo. His work was shown at the International Art Biennale, in Beijing, China and more recently he had a major one-person show there. In 2015, a comprehensive Mid-Career Retrospective of Neil Tetkowski, Rethinking Mythos, was held at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery in Ontario.

Neil Tetkowski has received numerous grants and awards including a Ford Foundation grant. His artwork is widely

published and placed in permanent collections of fifty museums including the Victoria and Albert in London, the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American Art, in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Modern Art Kogai-kan in Tokyo.

Some of Neil Tetkowski's projects have evolved into cultural, ecological and geopolitical exploration. In 2000, the artist conceived and built a sculpture at the United Nations using a blend of earth materials from every nation. There he physically involved people from every country of the world. The Common Ground World Project was officially endorsed at the United Nations as an environmental project and was exhibited in its completed form in 2002 at the Visitor's Lobby in New York. Neil Tetkowski continues to work on ideas relating to the global ecosystem. His Oil & Water Series focuses on the two critical resources that the world is most fiercely fighting to control.

Neil Tetkowski holds degrees from Alfred University and from Illinois State University. He has been a professor at Denison University in Ohio, the State University College at Buffalo and at Parsons School of Design in New York City. Neil Tetkowski lives in Manhattan and is the Director of University Galleries at Kean University in Union, New Jersey.



## MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

American Museum of Ceramic Art, Pomona, California  
Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona  
Burchfield-Penny Art Museum, Buffalo, New York  
Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
Canton Museum of Art, Canton, Ohio  
Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Castellani Art Gallery, Niagara Falls, New York  
City of Kanazawa, Kanazawa, Japan  
Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Sedalia, Missouri  
Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York  
Gardiner Museum, Toronto, Canada  
Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, Georgia  
Hetjens Museum, Dusseldorf, Germany  
Honolulu Academy of Arts, Honolulu, Hawaii  
Huntington Museum, Huntington, West Virginia  
Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois  
Illinois State Museum, Springfield, Illinois  
International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, Italy  
Keramion, Frechen, Germany  
Krone Museum, Idyllwild, California  
Long Beach Art Museum, Long Beach, California  
MacNider Museum, Mason City, Iowa  
Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York  
Morris Museum, Morris, New Jersey

Musee Ariana, Geneva, Switzerland  
Museum of Applied Arts, Helsinki, Finland  
Museum of Arts and Sciences, Macon, Georgia  
Museum of Arts and Design, New York City  
Museum of Modern Art, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Museum of Modern Art, Kogeikan, Tokyo, Japan  
Museum of Terra Cotta, Petroio, Italy  
Museum Prinsessehof, Leeuwarden, Netherlands  
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, New Jersey  
Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey  
Noyes Museum, Oceanville, New Jersey  
Ohi Museum, Kanazawa, Japan  
Racine Art Museum, Racine, Wisconsin  
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada  
San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, San Angelo, Texas  
Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art,  
Alfred, New York  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American Art,  
Washington, D.C.  
Suntory Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York  
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei  
The Palace of Culture, Warsaw, Poland  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England





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## THE STORY OF THE COMMON GROUND WORLD PROJECT

At the United Nations, 100 year-old Mary Livornese Cavalieri made her handprint. Then, one month-old Kelly Rose Tom placed her little handprint into the soft clay at the very center of the artwork. People from every nation participated equally in this project, and it is the first time earth from every nation of the world has been blended together to symbolically dissolve borders and boundaries.