

# YWCA Santa Monica / Westside Girl House Art Project

Issue #1 2005 Editor: Kesa Kivel



**Girl House Art Project:** Over a 10-month period, a diverse group of girls ages 11-13 will explore gender issues, express their findings through art, and empower themselves in the process. Using a small cottage and surrounding area on the YWCA Santa Monica / Westside campus, the girls will create an art environment that reflects their issues and educates the public. The project runs from September 2005 to June 2006.



The inspiration for the Girl House Art Project is the 1972 art project "Womanhouse," conceived by Paula Harper and led by famous and fabulous feminist artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. Twenty-one students from the California Institute of the Arts took over a 17-room Hollywood mansion for a two-month period in the fall of 1971. The purpose of the project was for the students to examine the limitations of female roles in society and to express their thoughts artistically about such limitations. In working on the project, the students developed carpentry, plumbing, and other skills. Consciousness-raising circles, in which students gathered to dialogue, debate, and share, were an integral part of the learning process. From January 30 to February 28, 1972, thousands of

people came to see "Womanhouse," a hugely successful and unique project.

Inspired by "Womanhouse," YWCA volunteer Kesa Kivel asked the YWCA in April 2005 if the small wooden cottage on the premises could be used as the setting for a Girl House Art Project, in which middle school girls would learn about gender issues and create an art exhibit to educate the public. The answer was YES! and Kesa became the Volunteer Project Leader, using parts of the curriculum that she had developed for other YWCA girls' programs. Shortly thereafter, Kesa Kivel and Barbara Olinger, the YWCA's Director of Family Development, were invited to meet Judy Chicago, who was in town on a book tour.



(left to right) Kesa Kivel, Judy Chicago, and Barbara Olinger stand in front of Creation, a tapestry woven by Audrey Cowan and designed by Judy Chicago.

**"It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."  
-Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady, humanitarian**



Adult Focus Group Closing Circle

A focus group of women was held on June 20, 2005 and a focus group of girls was held on August 16. The purpose of these groups was to engage a diverse group of women and girls in the Girl House Art Project planning process in order to make it the best project possible.

*Every girl, every color, every race  
Everyone we will embrace,  
Every choice, will have a voice,  
Every laugh, every smile  
Every difference, every style,  
Everyone a special part  
In our creative house of Art.*

*Cassandra Black, YWCA Childcare Director and children's book author, wrote the above poem during the "art" section of the Girl House Focus Group.*

**Next Issue:  
Meet our new Girl House assistant,  
Betty Marín, and the Girl House girls!**