

For Immediate Release

## **wHY's Innovative Partnership with EPACENTER ARTS Breaks Ground in East Palo Alto**



### **Architecture Firm Joins Organization's Youth and a Network of Community Advocates to Build State-of-Art Creative Resource for the City**

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**Groundbreaking Celebration  
Saturday, October 13, 2018  
at the new EPACENTER ARTS site  
East Palo Alto, California**

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**East Palo Alto, CA. October 2018** – In collaboration with youth and community advisors, EPACENTER ARTS – a youth art, design and music center slated to open in the heart of East Palo Alto, CA in 2020 – announced, with wHY, an ideas-driven and socially progressive firm regarded for designing spaces for the arts, that the construction of the new EPACENTER ARTS began late September 2018. A celebration marking the groundbreaking will take place with a community stakeholder event on Saturday, October 13, 2018.

The realization of EPACENTER is a result of an intensive, community-driven planning process that began in 2009 to address the need for high-quality, professional art services for children and young adults in a diverse area that's positioned among wealthy Peninsula cities, yet hasn't equally benefitted from the region's booming tech economy.

The groundbreaking announcement comes roughly three and a half years after EPACENTER and the John and Marcia Goldman Foundation – the project's lead funder and a prominent grant-making

organization in the Bay Area dedicated to youth-oriented art and education initiatives – reached a series of milestones in the project: In December of 2015 three acres of land at the corner of Pulgas Avenue and Bay Road were acquired, a few miles from Facebook’s Menlo Park headquarters, and EPACENTER first announced the plan to build a multidisciplinary art, design and music center at the site lead by Kulapat Yantrasast of wHY.

The engagement of a Youth Action Team in 2010 (with the guidance of Stanford’s John W. Gardner Center for Youth) also lent crucial early momentum to the project. Comprising a core group of East Palo Alto teenagers and young adults – representing the people who will use the center – at every step the team worked as equal partners with EPACENTER and wHY’s designers to determine the shape of the endeavor. Since its inception, the organization has actively engaged East Palo Alto’s youth, their families and community leaders from concept to development of the project, building the process into the organization’s ongoing youth-mentorship opportunities.

"Taking classes at EPACENTER and also contributing to the design process of the building and programming has been eye-opening for me" notes Jennifer Mancina, 16-year old native of East Palo Alto and an EPACENTER student. "Through this process, not only do I get to contribute in a real way to my community, but I get to create what my community is going to be about."

"It’s important to us to do something that was *by* the community, not just *for* the community," says John Goldman, president of the John and Marcia Goldman Foundation. "We believe art can transform lives and that all kids deserve to have a special place for creative expression. East Palo Alto’s cultural and artistic heritage, and its talented youth, are sources of power and strength. Together, we are building an artistic home in the city that will empower the young people of East Palo Alto and increase opportunities to inspire their imagination and engagement."

Design plans for the 25,000 square-foot structure include classrooms, artist studios, presentation galleries, a theater, professional grade recording facilities, a café, and other flexible-use community spaces, with an emphasis on visual, performing, and digital arts taught by practicing artists and professionals in the field.

wHY principal Kulapat Yantrasast and director Gregory Fischer of the Los Angeles and New York-based team at wHY partnered with Bay Area landscape architect Walter Hood Design to execute the project as well as EPACENTER’s youth and community task forces to envision the resources and design for the cultural landmark. Selected because of their commitment to community-driven design, wHY brings to the table a track-record of innovative, fiscally responsive approaches to cultural projects. Speaking to the project’s co-creation and crossover collaboration," Yantrasast noted, "the center truly celebrates "unity via diversity," achieving a complex whole without suppressing or ignoring the building’s diverse program or activities. The design is harmonious, where each of the stakeholder groups isn’t asked to compromise, but contributes to the sense of a collective home for all art forms. Throughout this process, we were continually reminded that designers who isolate themselves have difficulty connecting with their communities and end-users. Our partnership with East Palo Alto will not only have lasting effects, but pinpoints that deep collaboration must become the future of design."

"I applaud EPACENTER ARTS’ collaborative process, which considerably included the insights and recommendations from our city’s youth and ensured we selected the right architectural firm," says community advocate, Rolando Zeledon, executive director, Bayshore Christian Ministries, "wHY’s commitment to East Palo Alto’s voice and spirit, and their collaboration with the community ensured that the building would speak to the mission and honor and enliven East Palo Alto with a space that represents the power of the existing multicultural community and its creative potential."

In addition to the development of the building, the organization's internal growth also became an inclusive process, including the 2017 hiring of executive director, Nadine Rambeau whose candidacy was advised upon through a Town Hall meeting. Notes Rambeau, "To operate at this level of sophistication means investing in this community and its future. EPACENTER takes everyone's ideas seriously and puts real resources behind those ideas to ensure that the community develops over multiple generations and iterations. There is a rule that says it takes 10,000 hours to master a skill. EPACENTER goes beyond creative place making as it provides the time and space for young people to develop."

Two stories of adaptive spaces are designed for longevity and resilience, evolving with the organization while remaining environmentally aware, a core considerations of the organization. As a result, EPACENTER embraces an energy-use strategy that generates rather than consumes and accommodates for rising sea levels, supporting both natural and social ecologies. Notes Fischer, "There was a pervasive and very overt attitude that this endeavor could not succeed without multiple generations working together and being included in the result. The sophistication of these kids was impressive: they *schooled* us every time we came to the table. It was critically different from a developer-led project in that we created something *by* and *for* the community. Their objectives became ours, so the team's efforts went into uncovering and understanding those goals and delivering something in line with that – not bringing everyone around to get behind our ideas."

The project budget of \$50 million includes hard and soft building costs, plus an endowment to ensure the organization's long-term success. Plans for a capital campaign are expected to be announced in 2019.

### **EPACENTER Architectural Design**

At the core of East Palo Alto, wHY's newest Bay Area project, EPACENTER – a multidisciplinary art, design and music facility – is a space to gather, grow and thrive. Greater than the sum of its parts, the project reflects the desires, needs and goals of the community as architecture—where form, structure and program become the result of an intensive and unique process that engaged the community as equal partners in design. EPACENTER is an act of architectural agency on behalf of the community, where the locals, rather than the funding body, are the clients and the architects act as guides through the space-making process.

wHY began by embedding designers within the community. Building trust with the people of East Palo Alto, required developing a shared language about the building's design before pencil was ever put to paper. This process uncovered certain expectations the center would need to exceed: the building would need to feel open and inviting to the street, but provide safe and secure spaces for children to congregate; it would need to be a place where people could come even without official business being there; and it would need to connect all ages, backgrounds and populations through meaningful experiences with the arts.

What emerged is a synthesis of architecture and community: an elevated village that celebrates the diversity of the arts—with pavilions housing different creative disciplines that operate as a dynamic collection of creative spaces, internally visible and inspiring. Areas for visual arts, a multi-use theatre, a woodshop, youth center, band room and more are clustered in separate buildings, united by an expansive roof that at once provides shelter for circulation and creates protected outdoor areas for hanging out.

The pavilions cluster around a central courtyard creating a protective, horseshoe-shaped footprint, with two street-side façades that provide both sheltering enclosure and numerous opportunities to showcase art. The porous, village-like assemblage invites the public to participate in every area of the ground floor, strengthening connections between youth, the arts, and the community.

As a result, the building is infused with the intention of the community. The design is not merely a gift by the John & Marcia Goldman Foundation, but a tool for East Palo Alto to explore, express, and grow its identity and relevance in the face of rising social inequality and urban development.

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### **About wHY**

Founded in 2004 by Kulapat Yantrasast, wHY is a team of creative architects and designers based in Los Angeles & New York. As an ecology of disciplines, wHY's four workshops—IDEAS, BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE & OBJECTS—focus on projects large and small, from master planning and parks to the design of cultural institutions, galleries, exhibitions mixed-use spaces and private homes. The firm's work aims to bridge the gap between architecture and people, structured as an 'ecology of disciplines' to engage clients and their communications with the full array of ideas and thinking tools. wHY does not see great results in isolated, top-down design solution, but rather proposes addressing the problems of our times together by engaging society and people.

The practice is behind the world's first LEED Gold art museum; expanding with the international art market by designing outposts for prominent galleries and business, such as Christie's, Gagosian Gallery and Kordansky and CalArts' Student Center & Lounge; and re-presented important art collections for America's top institutions including the Art Institute of Chicago, Harvard Art Museums, Speed Art Museum, ICA LA and Marciano Art Foundation.

Ongoing cultural projects include the Asian Art Museum San Francisco; EPACENTER ARTS in East Palo Alto; The Metropolitan Museum of Arts AAOA Galleries; the re-design of the American Museum of Natural History's Northwest Coast Hall; a new multi-level home for R & Company in New York City, the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art, Culture, and Industry at the Riverside Art Museum; the reimagining of West Prince Street Gardens and the Ross Pavilion in Edinburgh, Scotland; and an expansion of Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles.

### **About EPACENTER ARTS**

Founded in 2009, EPACENTER ARTS is an arts and cultural organization that assists youth in the City of East Palo Alto discover and amplify their talents, realize their potential, and impact their world through the arts. EPACENTER ARTS is inspired by the belief that art transforms lives and shapes communities. Focusing on ages 12-25, we offer a variety of programs including visual, digital, and performing arts that highlight the cultural heritages of our community's Latino, African American, and Pacific Islander populations to bring families and cultures together.

Our name (pronounced "eppa-center arts") refers to the rich cultural energy of our home, the City of East Palo Alto (EPA). East Palo Alto's power and potential is evident in young people. At EPACENTER ARTS they realize their full potential, resulting in a stronger and more vibrant city.

Because we are a Creative Youth Development (CYD) organization, our experience-based programs apply best practices in youth development and arts education to amplify the artistic gifts of students and help them grow as creative thinkers and leaders. Skills acquired throughout the artistic process translate to greater outcomes for youth as they evolve into trailblazers in East Palo Alto and beyond. In practice, we believe that artists grow best in reflective learning environments with professional artists who serve not only as teachers, but also as mentors.

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**For more information about EPACENTER ARTS visit: <http://epacenterarts.org>**

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