



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Sharon Polli** (718) 254-9782

Sharon@groundswell.nyc

**Vanessa Hadox** (718) 254-9782

Vanessa@groundswell.nyc

**Mural Panel Unveiling on Ellis Island**

**As Nation Debates Immigration Policy,  
Youth Artists Illustrate Nation's Rich Immigration History**

**Mural Dedication Ceremony:** Sunday, May 17 at 1 PM

**Location:** Ellis Island, New York, NY 10004

**NEW YORK, NY** – Groundswell, New York City's leading organization dedicated to community public art, and the National Park Service, which cares for more than 400 national site of national and international importance, will unveil on Sunday, May 17, a six-part mural panel series celebrating the rich history of immigration to the United States. Entitled "Our American Narrative Continues," the series was created by teen artists and for public display at Ellis Island, to be seen by thousands of tourists each day.

"Groundswell's youth artist team was amazed to discover that nearly 12 million immigrants poured through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954," said Groundswell Executive Director Amy Sananman. "These new immigrants were hopeful of making their mark on the United States, and indeed many of them began with graffiti on Ellis Island itself – a meaningful parallel to the mark on the nation our youth artists have made today with the unveiling of this monumental new public artwork."

Through this project, 23 teen artists, working under the guidance of Lead Artist Danielle McDonald and Assistant Artist Adan Palermo, created the panel series as part of Groundswell's Teen Empowerment Mural Apprenticeship (TEMA), an afterschool program during which teen artists meet weekly throughout the school year to create large-scale public art projects for community-based partner organizations.

"As the National Park Service celebrates its centennial, the Groundswell murals provide a valuable opportunity that gives voice to the modern immigrant journey" said John Piltzecker, Superintendent of Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island. "The artwork gives expression that words alone cannot describe, and in turn, ties together nicely the historic and contemporary newcomer experience. We are tremendously excited to showcase the work of these talented artists."

The group began working on the mural series in October, meeting with National Park Service educators, taking field trips to relevant historical sites such as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, and conducting intensive research into the role of immigration in the United States. During their

research, they learned that more than 12 million immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island, the nation's chief gateway during the years 1892 to 1924. They discovered that today, more than 100 million Americans can trace their ancestry to the immigrants who crossed this island before dispersing to points all over the country. The students explored the public dialogue about immigration today, and asked themselves if America is still a nation which embraces its history as a country built by immigrants.

“Through this project, these talented youth artists have illustrated the personal side of the immigrant experience, both past and present,” said Lead Artist Danielle McDonald. “In doing so, they have conveyed the powerful notion that migration is a fluid process, not something to be overcome or shed.”

The panel series is split between a historic narrative, which illustrates the journey to and through Ellis Island, the immigrant identity during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the historic notion of the American Dream, and contemporary panels, which explore the process to become an American today, the fragmented identity experienced by many current immigrants, and the notion of the American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The historic panels have an aged, sepia-toned aesthetic, balanced by the vibrant, vivid color palette of the contemporary ones. Throughout the mural design, a butterfly motif suggests that freedom and migration is both essential to the human experience and beautiful and natural.

Ultimately, viewers of the panels are invited to question how the treasured notion of the American Dream, where once hard work gave the promise of personal achievement and success, has given way to one rife with challenges, obstacles, and barriers to success for new immigrants.

“Working with Groundswell on this series of murals has been very exciting,” said NPS Ranger Peter Wong, the park’s coordinator for the project. “It’s fantastic to see how intrigued the students were by what they learned about Ellis Island and how they translated that into these powerful works of art.”

This project is made possible through the generous support of the National Park Service. Major financial support for Groundswell’s 2014-15 Teen Empowerment Mural Apprenticeship (TEMA) program is also contributed by Altman Foundation, Ethel and W. George Kennedy Family Foundation, Lambent Foundation, Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, Sills Family Foundation, and Variety The Children’s Charity of New York, in addition to numerous individuals.

TEMA is made possible in part by public funds administered by the New York State Council on the Arts and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Groundswell is grateful to former New York State Assembly Member Joan Millman; the Office of the Mayor of New York City; the Office of the Speaker of the New York City Council; the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President; and New York City Council Members Brad Lander and Carlos Menchaca.

### **About Groundswell**

Groundswell, New York City's leading organization dedicated to community public art, brings together youth, artists, and community partners, to make public art that advances social change, for a more just and equitable world. Our projects beautify neighborhoods, engage youth in societal and personal transformation, and give expression to ideas and perspectives that are underrepresented in the public dialogue. [www.groundswellmural.nyc](http://www.groundswellmural.nyc)

### **About the National Park Service**

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world. [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

### **About Ellis Island**

Opened on January 1, 1892, Ellis Island became the nation's premier federal immigration station. In operation until 1954, more than 12 million immigrants were processed at the station. The main building was restored after 30 years of abandonment and opened as a museum on September 10, 1990. It has been estimated that more than 40 percent of America's population today can trace their ancestry through Ellis Island.

2016

National Park Service.  
CENTENNIAL

NPS.GOV

###