

AITo Update, December 2009: What Happens when the World Opens

Dear Friend of AITo,



As you may remember hearing, **last August AITo brought twelve Indonesian high school artists together for a special workshop on how to draw and paint from nature.** These 12 Tompotika youth had been selected by their teachers for showing artistic potential, but they'd had no previous experience or instruction in how to draw such things as fur, feathers, and leaves, nor even how to paint with watercolors or oil pastels. So **it was a completely new experience for them** to come together for 9 days in the Tompotika village of Teku to learn how to draw animals and plants under the expert instruction of Vashon Island

wildlife artist Sandra Noel. The students received instruction not only in art techniques, but in the ecology of many of the unique and endangered animals native to the forests and seas of their Tompotika home—some of which they didn't even know existed, and most of which they never gave much thought to, taking them for granted like wallpaper.

The workshop was a resounding success. The students were extremely grateful to have been given the opportunity. They worked very hard, and enjoyed the workshop themes—and each other—immensely. They also produced a lot of truly beautiful art work—all featuring Tompotika wildlife—that has since been pulled together into AITo's *Our Heritage, Our Future 2010 calendar* (you can pick one up at a local retail location or order through AITo using the attached form).



Recently, AITo staff had the privilege of delivering to the students printed copies of this calendar of their animal artwork, and witnessing how, for these students and their neighbors, the world opened. **Families gathered round, workers left their tasks, children clambered to see as the students carefully examined each precious page.** They pored over the paintings, the animal descriptions, and (naturally!) the photos of themselves. Some teared up. Others had to turn away, overwhelmed. All were visibly moved by the pride they felt in this first-ever acclaim they were receiving for their creative expression. Parents grinned. Neighbors maneuvered to try to get a copy for themselves. Grandmothers scrambled to offer food, their expression of gratitude.

And so what does it all mean, in the end? Was it just a fun project, where people had a great time, and everybody feels good? That much, certainly. But here at AITo, we pay attention to young people in part because we have faith in the future. And here are a few of the “ripples” we are already seeing in



Tompotika, just a few months after the workshop: children are testing each other on wildlife facts. The mother of one of the young artists showed us the pile of nature paintings he has continued to produce in the months since the workshop. Villagers have paged through the calendar, noting each of the 12 endangered wildlife species, and congratulating themselves with, “I've seen that one, that one, that one...” Many other villagers have noted that they didn't realize that these animals were globally important, unique to their area, and protected by law. **For many Tompotikans—those people**

living right at the heart of the Earth's biodiversity epicenter—the world has indeed opened: through the calendar project, they have found a new awareness and pride in their natural

heritage, new skills and expressions of their creativity, and new pride in the power of their youth. Over the coming year, we look forward to more ripples: for each calendar sold in the U.S., another will be distributed for free in Tompotika; we hope that every one of Tompotika's roughly 50,000 residents will see the calendar during 2010.

You can help the ripples spread. Buy a calendar or two. Better yet, **buy one of the original paintings done by the workshop students; the paintings are on display during the month of December at the Red Bicycle restaurant on Vashon Island, and each is framed and available for sale for \$60.** Proceeds from art sales will be split between the young artists themselves and AITo, to support this and other Art for Conservation projects. (If you are interested in the artwork but can't make it to Vashon Island, just contact us.)

In this holiday season, the AITo team wishes you much joy. We wish that you, too, may take pride and pleasure in the wonders of creation around you, and we are grateful for your support in helping to preserve and celebrate them. **May the world continue to open for all of us, and may there be peace on Earth for all creatures.** Happy holidays from the AITo team!

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