**Intro**

Guest photographer Quajay Donnell believes every fully functioning and healthy community needs space for public art. It’s about quality of life he says. Last year he shared some of his favorite murals and places to explore public art in the city with us, and this month he returns with portraits and words from our community with their favorite pieces in Rochester.

**Post 2**

For Mike and Michelle Weston, when it came to picking their favorite mural, there was a little back and forth on which place to choose because of their love and enjoyment of public art in Rochester.

“But in the end there was no decision -- it was Shawn Dunwoody's Douglass mural on South Ave that chose us,” Mike said. “From adopting Rochester as our home to becoming agitators to help awaken the church and community to injustice, our love for Douglass and passion for the work he initiated is connected to messages of the mural. From being the tiniest helpers in painting a section of the mural to playing around the school, using this location has helped us introduce and reinforce the values we hope to instill in our kids.”

Public art has a way of bringing a family together, to participate, explore, enjoy and learn.

#publicartmatters

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**Post 3**

Last March @dellarious wheat-pasted powerful images of incredible women to electrical boxes throughout the city in celebration of Women’s History Month. They’re timeless pieces and have aged well over the last year. One of those boxes, with the likeness of Harriet Tubman, at the corner of Goodman and Main resonated with @jackiemcgriff.

“I remember hearing Harriet's story for the first time back in elementary school. I couldn't imagine someone in those times escaping slavery and then, after reaching freedom, going back to save others,” Jackie shared. “Her story always hits me differently every time it's told and when there's something else uncovered about her story. She's always been my hero - unrelenting, determined, an agitator, a woman of faith.”

Public art inspires, and seeing Harriet on the streets of Rochester, albeit temporary, it continues to serve as inspiration for Jackie who wants to leave here having prepared a place for others.

“I'm grateful to be born into today's society but there's too much to be done to sit down and be complacent. My story will look nothing like hers but she is still my example.”

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**Post 4**

When Will Cleveland (@clevelandroc) was asked why he picked this particular wall on Scio Street near the Rochester Public Market, he responded with, “the pandemic pause gave us ample opportunity to re-examine what was important. It also presented a unique chance to explore and appreciate what we have in our own backyard.”

Will and his wife Cass (@cassizzcass) were committed to getting outside. “It was important to help us maintain our sanity,” he said. “In the process, we slowly discovered all the beautiful public art that surrounds us. No group better typifies Rochester’s graffiti scene than the legendary FUA Krew. We picked this 2013 mural from Bones, Snoe, Cruk, and Stop, because it showcases some of the city’s best writers and also illustrates the city itself.”

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**Post 5**

Sometimes it’s a breakfast sandwich that brings us to our favorite wall. That was the case for (@richardbcolon).

“I fell in love with this piece Forest for the Trees by HowNosm one day after leaving Harts Local Grocers, my favorite breakfast sandwich spot,” Richard said. “Every time I grabbed a sandwich there, I would make an effort to walk over and appreciate the detail and intricacy of this piece.”

While Harts is now closed, Richard continues to see that wall in passing and it brings back memories of those tasty sandwiches, and he continues to appreciate the beauty of the wall.

“It's amazing that after almost 10 years it still looks as vibrant as when it was painted in 2012,” he said. “It also reminds me of a Highlights Magazine "find these hidden objects" picture. There are so many details to be found in this piece. I actually found another when we posed for this photo.”

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**Post 6**

When Beth Larter was asked to share her favorite place for wall art, she gravitated towards two libraries — Frederick Douglass Community Library on South Avenue and Arnett Branch Library in the 19th Ward.

“For me, public art and public libraries both represent a wonderfully human impulse to create something that everyone and anyone can enjoy,” she said.

She finally settled on Arnett.

“The first time I visited the Arnett Library you had to look closely to recognize the industrial-looking building as a library at all. So I was delighted to discover a few summers ago that the drab exterior had been transformed into something that was beautifully and unmistakably a library. Since Arnett has become my local library, I have loved to see Richmond Futch, Chloe Smith, and Ebony Singleton continue to add their art to these walls, making them even more vibrant with every passing summer. Most of all, I love the way these walls express so brightly to the community the same message that we receive when we walk through those doors (or while the building was closed, when we checked out our books from the sidewalk)– that we are welcome, that we are worth investing in, and that there is always something new to explore at the library.”

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**Post 7**

For some, it’s their personal involvement that brings them to their favorite walls in Rochester. That was the case for Jace Christner who found himself volunteering one day for WALL\THERAPY in 2015.

“I signed up to help out for 4 or 5 hours,” Jace said. “But ended up staying the full day with Eder Muniz because I was having too much fun.”

Jace reflected on that day fondly, “The vibe was awesome, and people of all ages were stopping by to watch. I did not expect to get my hands dirty but Eder handed me a bucket of paint and told me to get up on the lift and get to work. Eder was dancing and painting on top of the ladder, he even painted from under my umbrella when it began to rain. The coolest part of the day was when his young daughter showed up and they painted together.”

It’s those cool memories that are still with him 6 years later, and now every time he rides by he thinks to himself with pride, "I helped paint that wall!"

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Post 8

For Adria Walker, who arrived in Rochester last August to work for the Democrat and Chronicle through Report America, the Justin Suarez mural on Gregory reminds her of home. It’s the magnolias in the mural that initially caught her attention because it brought her back to Mississippi, where magnolias blooming every year was something she looked forward to.

“This is one of the first murals I saw when I moved to Rochester,” she said. “I remember driving by, seeing it, and then pulling over, parking and walking back to look at it and take a picture of it.”

She sent that picture to her family with the message, "it's like home is following me -- magnolias in Rochester.”

Then there’s the owl in this mural on the side of Misfit Doughnuts, which she appreciates the potential duality of.

“In Choctaw mythology, owls can be an omen of death. It's what I thought of when I first saw it, which was kind of bleak,” she said. “Some myths say that owls symbolize protection and ancestry, so I'm going with that instead.”

She drives down Gregory when she’s having a long day, to get a glance of this mural and also the Son House electrical box art by Thievin Stephen at the other end of the street. House is another Mississippian who called Rochester home from about 1943 to 1976.

Public art can be about a connection to home, and on Gregory Street, Adria can always get a little bit of Mississippi.

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Post 9

“In the beginning it was just me and an idea,” Dr. Ian Wilson recalled about the early days of WALL\THERAPY.

Since that first summer the crew has grown, and the art and community intervention project has curated hundreds of murals, while, as their mission states, transforming the urban landscape, inspiring, and building community. And Ian has been on the front lines since the inception, which made choosing a wall a bit challenging because they’re all special.

When asked why he gravitated towards the 2014 wall from SHOE, “A Word is an Image” on Atlantic Avenue as one of his favorites, he said it was because of the personal connection to graffiti writing.

“SHOE is a writer. My brother was a writer. I used to write,” he said. “The letters after SHOE’s tag are CIA, which stands for Crazy Inside Artists. CIA was Dondi’s crew. Dondi was one of the singular most important writers in graffiti culture. He also hailed from my part of Brooklyn — East New York. For me SHOE’s piece composed of letters is a connection to, not only my origins, but the foundation of this public art movement. In the beginning … there were letters. And they were good.”

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Post 10

As co-curator and lead organizer for WALL\THERAPY, Erich Lehman has had a front row seat to many of the walls over the last decade.

“Picking one mural is impossible,” Erich said. “I’ve been there for the “birth” of almost all of our WALL\THERAPY murals, and each has their own special story.”

Much like Ian, picking a favorite is no easy task when you have that kind of connection.

When asked why this wall, Erich said, “this one by Bones @bones\_tribute from 2014 means a lot to me. It’s the only official wall he did with us before he passed away in 2016. It’s also one of the first murals people see when driving into the city from the East side.”

For Erich, he felt it was really important for WALL\THERAPY to have a traditional graffiti piece showcased prominently out of its usual locations, alongside other types of mural art. This piece, usually under lock and key behind a fence, jumps out at you on Atlantic Avenue as you pass by.

“It’s here to show that graffiti is as important and powerful as other types of art in the streets,” he said.”And Bones was simply one of the best to do it.”

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Post 11

When your full time job is the director of market communications and public relations for Visit Rochester, a mural that screams Rochester would probably be your favorite. That’s part of the reason why Rachel Laber Pulvino (@rachelfromrochester) landed on @shawndunwoody’s “Greetings from Rochester” mural on Park Avenue.

“The mural and the message perfectly represent what I do in my role at @visitrochester, welcome visitors to Rochester,” Rachel said. “In addition to its welcoming message, the mural is a homage to a classic travel postcard and is a popular photo-op spot for visitors.”

But it’s also her love for the city that makes this mural in the parking lot near @parkleighrochester a favorite.

“Of course, the message of “I’d Rather Be in Rochester” rings very true for me, as whether for work or for play there is nowhere else I’d rather be than right here in Rochester, NY.”

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Post 12

Sometimes it’s the relationship with the artist behind the wall that makes a mural special. For Jason Barber (@jasonbarber82), his friendship with Brittany Williams (@bwilliamsart) makes this wall -- hand painted on the side of Shaq Mini Mart on Joseph Avenue for WALL\THERAPY (@walltherapyny) in 2015 and her first public art piece -- even more important to him. “I’ve always loved this wall,” Jason said. “Even after a fire took part of the building, the mural remains. They even changed the color of the rest of the building to match.”

Brittany was one of the artists Jason had known previously, and would later help her organize her first show after a trip to Berlin with WALL\THERAPY.

It’s not just that friendship, it’s her talent as an artist that Jason believes in. He said he also recognizes and appreciates the power of a Black woman creating powerful images of Black faces in Rochester, and what that means and does for a community.

“It’s representative of some of the best art in our city,” he said.

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Post 13

“It just reminds me so much of Rochester,” Hope Breen said about the 2014 mural by Tavar Zawacki for WALL\THERAPY near the Public Market. “To me the arrows pointing upward remind me to keep moving forward.”

For Hope, it wasn’t until she started studying travel and tourism at MCC that she realized how much she really appreciated Rochester and the surrounding area. That passion would later result in the launch of [@rocthecitywithhope](https://www.instagram.com/rocthecitywithhope/) - encouraging locals to become tourists in their own backyards.

“So many people sleep on Rochester,” she said. “But year after year we as a city are growing so much more momentum. Social media I think especially has been a great resource for people to come together and appreciate Rochester more through the different photography channels and so many different individuals working to improve and love on Rochester.”

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Post 14

For Dr. David Paul, a physician by day and night, and the CEO of Bold and Gritty, he said, “Good trouble” is what he’s been getting into his entire life.

“Whether it’s advocating for my patients or engaging in social entrepreneurship — I’m always finding ways to disrupt the status quo,” he said.

The connection to this space on State Street goes back to one Saturday afternoon last November. Paul, who runs the coffee-focused lifestyle brand with his wife La’ren, brewed some coffee, loaded up his car and set up shop in the parking lot while the John Lewis mural was being painted. Over the course of a few hours he offered free cups to those that came down to see Darius, Dan, Jared and Ephraim working on the 3,000 square foot photorealistic hand painted mural, while admiring the work himself. Once completed, he’d revisit Mr. Lewis several times, and the power of an influential Black man on the side of a wall downtown is not lost on him.

“You can’t look at this mural of John Lewis and not reflect on where you stand in the arc of history,” he said. “It’s more than just a painting, it’s a place in the heart of the city, where conversations can begin. It’s the image of Rochester, I want my son to always remember.”

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Post 15

“Pick a favorite? That’s impossible. Similar to the stories I’ve shared, each wall for me is special for a separate reason. Instead of one single wall, I settled on a space — Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park at Manhattan Square. This photo of me by Rachel Shipman was taken in January in front of the Danielle Ponder portrait by Sarah Rutherford in the amphitheater. It’s the middle of the 2019 WALL\THERAPY mural featuring a portrait of Mikaela Davis by Justin Suarez to her right and a portrait of Moses Rockwell by Brittany Williams to her left. The ground and walls of the bowl were painted black last summer to serve as a giant chalkboard to capture messages of protest, solidarity and inspiration. On another wall is a mural dedicated to Daniel Prude. Up on Chestnut is the four sided mural by Shawn Dunwoody dedicated to MLK, Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass. On Court “Black Lives Matter” is painted down the street. This entire space is powerful, and with a camera in hand, I’ve been photographing every change since last year.

I want to thank Celebrate City Living for the opportunity to share my story and those stories of our neighbors this month for Celebrate: Public Art + You. I hope you’re encouraged to continue to get out and enjoy the public art in Rochester!”

Photo Credit: Rachel Shipman