

COVER STORY



MORE THAN MURALS

Courtesy photo

ABOVE: A mural titled "No Limit," done by Nashua-based group Positive Street Art, depicts New Hampshire's Christa McAuliffe pointing to words of inspiration that read: "Push yourself as far as you can. There is no limit. Reach for the stars." McAuliffe was one of seven crew members aboard the space shuttle Challenger when it exploded in 1986, seconds into its lift-off from Cape Canaveral, Fla. She is considered to be the first teacher in space. The mural is located on the corner of Ash and West Hollis streets in downtown Nashua.

Public art in Nashua leaves positive mark on city

"Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life."
- Pablo Picasso

Nothing transforms a place quite like public art. Sun and wind come and go; weather is transitory, but art, strategically placed, not only transforms a place, it actually creates new space. A psychic space, emotional space, contemplative space where there had been none before. There is a universal quality to public art-it can engage memory; stir the imagination; give a message; pay tribute to the past; celebrate an anniversary; listen to and embody the ideals of a community.

When I had lunch with former New Hampshire State Poet Laureate Marie Harris recently, we reminisced about one of her first pieces of public art that I wrote about in 1986. "Sunapee Mandala" was a collaboration between sculptor Emil Birch and Harris—a merger between granite and ceramic sculptural relief and 14 lines of poetry. Visited by this granite "presence," the Sunapee hillside remains forever transformed, irrevocably touched by something beyond grass and dirt-celebrating the earth, wind and fire of seasonal New Hampshire.

Street art of a different kind, urban art can be equally as powerful but in a different way. Nothing expresses restraint and establishes its borders better than a wall—the space between—and yet nothing transforms a wall like art. Man's desire to paint on a wall, to paint murals, is as old as humankind. Cave paintings in southern France—the Lascaux Grottoes—date back at least 20,000 years.

The word mural has its origins in the Latin word "murus" which means "wall." Art walls not only beautify cityscapes, they also build bridges in the community.

The "Yankee Flyer Diner" mural was such a piece, painted in 1997, by Nashua artist James Aponovich, located on the Mimosa Nails wall on Main Street, opposite Citizens Bank. It marks the exact

location of the iconic 1940s diner that Aponovich remembered while growing up in Nashua. In 2015, City Arts of Nashua sponsored its restoration by the artist, assisted by Elizabeth Johansson Aponovich, in their Peterborough studio.

In the last few years, there has been a surge in public street art in Nashua, due to Positive Street Art, founded in 2012, by artists Manuel Ramirez and Cecilia Ulibarri, aimed at transforming the public's perception of and experience with graffiti. When the proprietor of the downtown Nashua Dunkin' Donuts offered the artists their riverside wall and a thousand dollars to paint a mural, Public Street Art was born.

Murals can educate and embody positive messages as reminders to a neighborhood and the community at large. The

"Garden Giant," painted on the wall facing the Rail Trail at the corner of Ash and West Hollis streets, faces the community garden that Nashua PAL and the Nashua Health Department built to teach youth about gardening, agriculture and how to grow your own food. On the adjacent corner the "No Limit" mural, a tribute to astronaut Christa McAuliffe, the first teacher in space, encourages youth to stay active, educated and healthy, embodied in the quote that appears on the mural: "Push yourself as far as you can. There is no limit. Reach for the stars."

When Main Street United Methodist Church demolished storefronts that had hidden its historic auxiliary building, it also revealed a long, open "free" wall facing the church grounds. Richard Lannon, owner of the Lannon Company and the Chase building in which Positive Street Art has its office, asked Ramirez to paint a mural to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Chase Building, which had housed three theaters—the Tremont, State and Star Theaters. In the "Nostalgia" Mural, Ramirez depicted scenes from classic movies, including "The Blob," "The Three Stooges," "Gone



The most recent Positive Street Art mural, "The Promise," located on the Quincy Street wall of the Nashua Foundry, was dedicated this year on Veterans Day.

Courtesy photo



D. QUINCY WHITNEY



Staff file photo

Positive Street Art's Manuel Ramirez concentrates on the details on a figure while painting the "Nostalgia" mural in Nashua in 2016.

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