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Mural maven

Tallahassee 'math fanatic' splashes color around town

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

As a second grader, artist Kollet Probst sat in front of a mirror and drew a self-portrait. The task was busy work assigned by a teacher during a school open house, yet it blossomed into a passion that grew from a sheet of paper to a city wall.

Probst's murals are spread throughout Tallahassee, including the windows at the Challenger Learning Center of Tallahassee.

The glass reflects her face as she paints scenes that correlate with the center's IMAX film showings. For all these murals, including her most recent for "Superpower Dogs 3D," Probst wants patrons to see themselves reflected back as well.

"There's always some type of negative space where the child will walk up and see themselves interacting with that wall," says Probst. "I remember with 'Cuba,' I painted a car and left the window blank so it looked like they were driving the car."

Probst completed her first mural at age 17. Her handiwork left paw prints trailing the walls of Griffin High School's front faculty office. Later that year, she painted the drywall facades at the Tallahassee Mall.

Probst looks up to gritty underground artists like Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat who paved the way for muralists and



Kollet Probst keeps the murals updated at IMAX Theatre. PHOTOS BY KOLLET PROBST

fine artists alike. Similarly, she finds joy in diverting expectations as a five foot two woman up on a scissor lift.

"It's hard with new development and construction to go into a man's world," says Probst. "When I first show up to a job, they may not think I'm capable. My pride is when its done and I leave."

Probst earned an academic scholarship to Florida State University for art history and education. She describes the 12-year detour she took from art, and began recovering from alcoholism and addiction four and a half years ago. Probst is thankful for local artist

If you go

What: Superpower Dogs 3D

When: Showtimes Vary Daily

Where: Challenger Learning Center, 200 S Duval St

Cost: \$8 adults, \$7 seniors/students, \$6 children

Contact: For more information please call 850-645-7796 or visit <https://www.challengerlh.com/showtimes/>.

Dean Gioia for giving her the push to jump back into painting as a career.

"I started back very humbly, trying to keep my hands from shaking while getting clean," says Probst. "I find a peace and harmony when I'm creating now like it was when I was drawing in my youth."

She describes the part of her brain that craves fulfillment as a useful tool in the creation process. As a conceptual artist, she begins with inspiration or a commission—for CLC that comes in the form of marketing materials for their upcoming films. From there, she taps into her inner child and represents this point of view in the images.

Once an image is in her mind, Probst executes exactly what she sees. Diagrams map out the dimensions with a great deal of geometry and math. Probst calculates the wall, walking up and down the length of it before

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Murals

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sketching it out in chalk and paint. A fan of numbers, she grids out faces and people, converting inches on a page to feet on a wall space.

“Murals are a lot of math and I’m a math fanatic,” says Probst. “There are times I walk up to a wall and have a vision that I have to modify because there’s an imperfection I wasn’t planning on. You pivot sometimes, but normally I don’t wiggle.”

Probst recently finished a 185-foot long mural at the Leon County Fairgrounds that took her five weeks to complete. Other jobs will take anywhere from three to five days. She’s most proud of the warrior on the river in Indianhead Acres and the Chief Osceola she created at the corner of Airport Drive and Eppes Drive.

Each mural is an experience for Probst, who describes them as time capsules. It is what makes the windows at the CLC such a unique job given their temporal nature. The first window she completed was for “America’s Musical Journey,” with Elvis and Louis Armstrong as focal points. Music is a constant presence for Probst while she paints.

“I listen to music to block out my surroundings,” says Probst who goes up on a ladder with her headphones on. “I listen to classic hip-hop and rock. The music calms me and helps me to focus on the painting.”

The front entrance of the IMAX Theater on Kleman Plaza is an ever-shifting template, but that ephemerality doesn’t bother Probst. She enjoys when



Artist Kollet Probst splatters Makaylah Verheyen, 9, with paint as they work to complete a mural on the Grace Mission Episcopal Church. JOE RONDONE/DEMOCRAT

people send her pictures on social media of the murals, and sees their fluid nature as a nod to the children that continue to change and grow as they’re greeted by each new image.

With “Superpower Dogs 3D,” she wanted to make the dogs as realistic as possible so that children would want to come up and pet them. The lengths that these canine heroes went to in each of their stories struck her. Their strength very much reflects her motto in life to be fearless, and know that you can always fix mistakes and paint anew. Even more than that, she wants to use that paint to reflect Tallahassee’s personality.

“If we show pride and love in our area it does deter crime and it helps with pride of ownership,” says Probst. “I’ve been here my whole life, I’ve traveled and I keep coming back. People come here and need to see the charm that Tallahassee has.”

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).