



In Downtown Lawrence, Artists Bring A Demolished Mural Back To Life


By VICKY DIAZ-CAMACHO • JUN 14, 2017

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(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kcur/files/styles/x_large/public/201706/061416_cj_new_pollinators_mural.jpg)

Tommee Sherwood (left) and Barry Barnes of a band called Zydeco Tougeau helped celebrate the new version of 'Pollinators' in downtown Lawrence.

VICKY DIAZ-CAMACHO / KCUR 89.3



A team of Lawrence and Kansas City artists have “revived” a lost mural in downtown Lawrence.

Figures painted in vibrant purples, blues and greens are shown gesturing, singing and gardening in “Pollinators,” which decorates the side of the relatively new loft building on the 800 block of New Hampshire.



“It's historic isn't it?” said Saralyn Reece Hardy, director of the Spencer Museum of Art (<https://www.spencerart.ku.edu/>), to a crowd of about 50 people who gathered at a celebration on Friday, June 9.

The original mural was created and painted by artist Dave Loewenstein (<http://www.daveloewenstein.com/>) in 2007 on the same site.

The new “Pollinators” is a re-imagined work that commemorates past and present African-American artists with Kansas connections. The first one honored Gordon Parks, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Oscar Micheaux, Hattie McDaniel and Coleman Hawkins; this time, Janelle Monae was added.

The original “Pollinators” went down with a building that was demolished in 2015. So Susan Earle, the Spencer’s curator of European and American art, along with the City of Lawrence and property owner First Management joined forces to revive the work.

So far, more than 150 painters have worked on the project, which is still in progress.

For many residents at the celebration, the original mural was integral to Lawrence’s cultural fabric.



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The original 'Pollinators,' on a building in the 800 block of New Hampshire in Lawrence, was painted by Lawrence muralist Dave Loewenstein in 2007. The building was torn down in 2015.

CREDIT COURTESY DAVE LOEWENSTEIN

Honoring African-American artists and emphasizing the importance of identity and relationship meant much to those with connections to the neighborhood.

“I used to live right over there,” said Lawrence Mayor Leslie Soden, who pointed toward a white house at the corner of Rhode Island and 8th Street. She said she used to walk by the original mural all the time.

The theme, she said, stuck with her. That’s why she chose to feature it in a promotional video for Lawrence.

Kansas City artist Nedra Bonds (<http://kcur.org/post/after-kicking-cancer-kansas-city-artist-nedra-bonds-shows-her-lifes-work#stream/0>), who contributed to the work, said she could also relate to the “Pollinators” idea.

Years ago, Bonds said, she was in New York and sought help from a police officer to get back home. He asked her where she was from, and when she responded with “Kansas,” he said, “There ain’t no black people in Kansas.”

That, Bonds said, was “all the more reason why we need to celebrate the black people in Kansas – the pollinators all over the world.”

That didn't mean just talking "about black people," Bonds added, "but about our relationships that we have with each other in Kansas."

"The story [of the mural] touches on many aspects of Lawrence, its many cultures and its challenges," said Loewenstein, who was commissioned to lead the new project. The mural tells the story of destruction and rebirth, he said.

"And how we are choosing to develop and make it our own," he added.

Loewenstein said the goal was to spur dialogue between strangers on the street and foster more relationships through art. If the conversation at the new "Pollinators" dedication was any indication, it's already working.

KCUR contributor Vicky Diaz-Camacho has written for multiple local and national publications, including Alt.Latino. Follow her on Twitter @vickyd_c (https://twitter.com/vickyd_c).

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