



# **ADAMO DRIVE MURAL PROJECT**

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*Adamo Drive is getting a facelift.*

Every day thousands pass Tampa's National Historic District on Adamo Drive.

Unfortunately the image presented is one of a tired, weather-beaten, industrial park in decline rather than the threshold of a vital community and the historic and cultural base of a great city. A group of District residents, endorsed by the Art Programs Manager for the City of Tampa, the Tampa Public Art Committee, and the Ybor City Development Corporation (YCDC), have decided to take a major step in reinvigorating the pride and enthusiasm for Ybor City throughout the Tampa Bay area.

Art inspires, heals, and strengthens community. With Art we can enhance environments, create positive places, and improve the quality of life in communities. Art's function is to tie cultures and communities together. It always reflects the culture in which it exists. We must respect a place's history while at the same time celebrating what its identity is now. Art's impact is far greater when it allows the viewer and community to enhance, engage and feel excitement about their sense of place.

Ybor City has such a rich history and diverse culture that it seems as though the perfect way to get community members excited about their place again is to invite them to take an active role in improving it.

We have enlisted notable local artist Michael Parker to facilitate this exciting endeavor.

Michael has extensive experience working with communities on public and community art projects. With public mural commissions across the country, Michael emphatically calls the Tampa Area home. He has taught a wide range of arts courses, including very unique community arts courses, as a member of the arts faculty at the University of South Florida and the University of Montana. While in Tampa he also founded and ran a non-profit organization for 6 years called Community Stepping Stones, whose mission is concerned with the quality of life in neighborhoods. CSS is dedicated to providing education, mentoring children and adolescents while enhancing the community economics and enriching the quality of life in the community through the arts.

The Site: Adamo Drive between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> streets. If you've ever driven this stretch of road, you have seen the building in question: rounded tops, corrugated steel, a whole block long. What goes on behind that decaying façade? For all a passerby knows, these dinosauric carports could be housing all of Ybor City.

Purpose: To turn this industrial decay into an inviting boundary and positive landmark with one of the largest public murals in the region. To help residents of Ybor take an active role in improving the image of their place, and to be a part of its changing identity.

Enclosed you will find Michael's exciting approach to gathering interest and enthusiasm for neighborhood revitalization and community art, as well as a project outline with budget and timeline, and examples of Michael's previous projects. Please join us as we inject new life into a neglected, yet critical site in Ybor City.



## **The Artist's Philosophy**

More often than not, a community gets to see a piece of public art after it is installed onto their landscape. Do we live with it, enjoy it, or contemplate it? I have often pondered this phenomenon while trying to process all the other sensory-overloading things happening in day-to-day life. It captured my interest for years because I always felt that art and the creative process should be that one thing that helped people to experience their lives and their place in the world in a different way. At the very least, art should be the vehicle for a persona to take an active role in his own personal development, or for a person to get a fresh perspective if he so wished.

In modern culture, it is a common occurrence for an artist to hear, "What are you going to do with your art education?" This question is sometimes discouraging to an artist because it implies that the questioner doesn't believe in the role of an artist in our society, or the artist's abilities. In fact, this question couldn't be more encouraging because art is so integral to society that sometimes people can't actually see the role it plays. You can apply basic art training to almost any problem-solving situation. You can use the elements of design within almost any real world application. I say, "What can't you do with it?" The reality is that we are discouraged from pursuing knowledge in art and design because it promotes alternative perception. To be creative is not only an asset, but also a natural human function. When thinking about the training I had in art, I myself thought, "How does this apply?" I quickly found that the role of the artist is not romantic, but being one definitely is.

The creative process should be accessible to everyone and intertwined in the fabric of everyday life. After spending some time in the Tampa Area, I got commissioned to paint a fairly large public mural. At the time, I was living in a very blighted and depressed neighborhood. One of the things that worried me was that I saw the school busses come through the neighborhood every morning, but I didn't see them leaving with any kids on them. When there were a few kids on the bus, they didn't carry any books. I asked myself what they were doing if they weren't getting on the bus. At one point, I ended up knocking on a few doors of some teens that I was acquainted with, and got the same story at each house. I walked into a room full of adults and children. Then it occurred to me that if the adults weren't leaving to go do something productive, why would the children. Here is where I used art. I expanded the budget of my commission to include six part time jobs for qualified teenagers in my neighborhood. If they did not go to school, they were required to work with me all day under contract, open a bank account and receive a percentage of their pay when they graduated from high school. We went through the entire process of creating a mural from proposal to conception, then on to production and completion. They all graduated high school and five went to college. (A more detailed description of the Sulphur Springs murals and Community Stepping Stones and the community impact is included in the packet.)

So what are we going to do with it?



## The Process

In all of the art in the public or community that I create, the process is as important as the product. Before any painting begins, I gather as much interest in the project as possible. I will invite residents and business owners to participate in the process from day one. I believe that inviting the community to be involved in the process accentuates the project because the community members acquiring the art are those who ultimately create it. One of the things that distances the public from art in general is that the creative process is becoming increasingly inaccessible. One of my goals in all of my projects is to make the art and the process accessible to everyone.

I create a core group of participants from the neighborhood right away. This way, it is not just the lone artist enlisting the help of the community; it becomes a group of residents led by an artist. Communities feel ownership and pride when they can participate and create with their neighbors. This group will be composed of any and all interested persons that I can make contact with including business owners and community members. Hillsborough Community College Ybor has also agreed to create a class dedicated to this specific project in which art students can get practical application of their art skills and also begin to take a mentorship role with community members just beginning to use the creative process. Students create relationships with local entities and press to make everyone aware of what is happening before the actual application begins. This way you create a large network of people that are excited to be involved and see what happens. By the time the application begins, a vast number of people are already invested in the project.

Once people realize that they can be a part of creating the art, it literally becomes theirs and the community's. A project like this is really an opportunity to create relationships that might not have existed otherwise. I am passionate about this aspect of the work I do. The participants from *all* of my projects have remained friends long after the project was complete and many did not know each other before it began.

When I begin working with a group to formulate a design, our main concentration is how to engage the viewer. Working through design processes with community members has consistently brought repeating patterns to the forefront. In these groups, I talk about the basic elements of design and how to apply these to appeal to the widest array of people possible. I talk about visual communication and explain that it is an enormous responsibility to the community to create such a large visual work.

In the public projects that I've executed, much of my style comes from the teaching that I do with the community. The workshops are meant to ensure that a group of people can work together on one image and that the images will be high contrast and intense, while retaining simply composed and aesthetically pleasing elements. I've found this method helpful for a number of reasons. I cover basic painting techniques that almost anyone can learn. When I have a large group working with me, I can feel comfortable knowing that everyone could execute the project without me. My approach also lends itself to making the image very dramatic in terms of color. In design workshops, I ask so many questions that answers begin to sound like stories running together. At a certain point in these sessions, the stories become very visual and at this point we begin to sketch. We record the stories and record the visual elements of these oral representations. Sometimes they are about people, sometimes places, and when

we are really getting somewhere, they become ideas. Further down the line in the process, the participants usually realize that their perspectives on place have developed to maturity. The group in Missoula moved from images of fish and buffalo, to images of indigenous plants and landscape, to the idea of isolation and wilderness versus civilization. I feel like I must nurture this creative process within people in order for the final image to reach its full potential. For this I must spend some time with them.

Developing the theme of the image is an integral part of the process. I almost always search for the identity of a place through its residents. In my experience, you can get a much more accurate representation of a place by asking as many people as possible than by trying to figure it out as an individual. The project in Sulphur Springs was a perfect example of this. I would have never known that each of the teens I worked with was without a father in their lives unless we had been working together to form imagery. Upon further investigation we found that they weren't alone. It had become a very common thread among young people in that neighborhood, and seemed almost natural to use this situation to represent what was really positive about their lives: their mothers and grandmothers.

This kind of project always reminds people that they are living in a culturally vibrant and happening place. Sometimes we forget even though we are living within it every day. It's when people participate in the unfolding of their own culture, history, and art in a passionate way that things get really exciting.

### **Process outline**

- Step 1
- Invitation for public to Participate
  - Internet, flyers, events, schools, clubs, associations
- Create Core Group of participants
  - Schedule of meetings and commitments
  - Advertise schedule, re-extend invitation to the public
- Begin workshops and training
  - Determine meeting place and regular weekly schedule with participants to encourage drop in and available participation from the public.
  
- Step 2
- Workshops
  
- Basic Art Skill as it relates to Mural and outdoor application
  - Introduction to public and community art
  - Drawing
  - Painting
  - Digital processes
  - History, Place identity
- Design
  - Forum based workshops
    - ◆ How to conceptualize a neighborhood
    - ◆ Concept to Visual image
    - ◆ Editing and Organizing Visual information
    - ◆ Representing place with visual imagery
- Practical application
  - Materials and tools
  - Scaling
  - Safety
  - On and Off site professionalism
- Community Feedback

- Survey, poll, exhibition of mockup or design for public input
- Step 3
- Preparation and production
  - Determine schedule to further encourage public participation
  - Create list of site-specific challenges and delegate individual roles
  - Begin application of painting

To help visualize the process, we have included descriptions and images of Michael's past projects. Each one is unique in that each place has a different identity and set of needs that can be explored with this approach. For example, a park where the piece becomes a part of a recreational activity. A vacant furniture showroom building where the viewer happens upon the piece in a vast expanse of rural commerce. A busy, close-knit, working class neighborhood outside of Boston struggling with vandalism. A railroad underpass that clearly divides wilderness from civilization and the pedestrian from the motorist. Each site has posed its own individual challenge to engage the viewer and the transformation that happened in each space reinvigorated the social interest and visual landscape of that place.

## **General guidelines and timeline**

### **Approximately 16-18 weeks from start of community workshops**

Initial startup such as gathering a core group of participants and creating local interest in the project not included in the 16-18 weeks

**6-7 weeks:** Education and workshops (teens and community members):

-Two afternoons and half of a Saturday each week for six to seven weeks open to all members of the community to be held at a location to be determined

**3 weeks:** Drawing, scaling exercise, simple color mixing technique and talking about concepts

**2 weeks:** Photography: digital and disposable cameras

**2 weeks:** Computer design and collage

**3-4 weeks:** Design

-Taking finalized elements and creating a cohesive image that reflects the surrounding community, then and now, with teens and community residents.  
-Project participants presenting final design to concerned members of the community.

**6-8 weeks:** Execution: depending on community involvement in the production process

-Prepping and painting wall with approved and completed design.

## Michael's Previous Work

### **“Head Heart and Hand”, Ruskin, FL 2008 18”x 115”**

The Community Mural Project launched the first annual BIG DRAW-Ruskin in the center of historic Ruskin. Michael Parker was selected by the South Shore Arts Council to lead a community group through a process of designing and painting the mural.

Michael, with assistant Dave Bush of Community Stepping Stones of Tampa, recruited a community group of local teens and adults, who spent 6 weeks in workshops and design sessions planning the mural. The intergenerational group engaged in an intense collaboration of research, photography, and discussion of possible ideas. Workshop sessions focused on drawing, painting, and digital processes as well as an introduction to skills and formal principles involved in both designing and painting a large-scale work.

The final design concept was based on John Ruskin's social ideal that human happiness requires the mix of the head, heart and hand. The mural imagery includes references to the historic Ruskin, the agricultural and environmentally sensitive setting across the bay from urban centers, development and movement to future possibility. The design was completed in early October and painted over a four-week period.

This project was a good example of confronting a challenging situation. The temperature barely dropped below 95 and got into triple digits frequently. The group consisted of teens and seniors. The wall faced the south, so it never got shade. We worked in shifts, always cooling each other down with water and building shade for each other. The experience created a much stronger bond among the participants. One young woman even wrote about the experience, which gained her entry into college.



### **“Exactly”, Rowlett Park, Tampa, FL 2007 20’x 80’**

Rowlett Park is located in an extremely depressed area of Tampa in which the High

school drop out rate is astronomical. We held a tryout in which thirty neighborhood youths attended. From this tryout, six were selected to participate. The process consisted of four months of after school classes including painting, drawing, Photoshop and job training on Saturdays. Once the teens felt prepared, they began the design process. After a month of ideas, sketching, photography, and interviews, they had a completed design. Upon completion of the design they were required to present it to The City of Tampa's Public Art Program, and the Sulphur Springs Neighborhood Association. Upon approval we began the execution. Under contract, the teens were required to keep journals of their progress, time sheets and bank accounts. Each teen was paid \$7.50 an hour and was required to save a percentage to be received upon graduation from high school.

Developing the theme of the image is an integral part of the process. I almost always search for the identity of a place through its residents. In my experience, you can get a much more accurate representation of a place by asking as many people as possible, than to try to figure it out as an individual. This project was a perfect example of this. I would have never known that each of the teens was without a father in their lives unless we had been working together to form imagery. Upon further investigation we found that they weren't alone. It had become a very common thread among young people in this neighborhood, and seemed almost natural to use this situation to represent what was really positive about their lives: their mothers and grandmothers.



**Orange Street Underpass, Missoula, MT 2010 Dimensions Variable**

Representing a place in a visual image along with your peers becomes an intense

collaboration. It is helpful to put aside preconceived notions of what you think as an individual and leave the playing field open.

For this particular project we began with a simple conversation about the site we were about to paint. The Orange St. Underpass is a particularly strange place. It is one of three major gateways in and out of Missoula. Upon further investigation, we recognized a strange relationship that happens here at this site. The relationship between the pedestrian and the motorist. Here its a one way. The pedestrian has no choice but to pay close attention to the motorist, but the motorist pays almost no attention to the pedestrian. Whoever you may be, passing through this space is a strange experience. There is just enough time as you travel through to feel like you have been transported to another place.

This idea led us to realize a unique aspect of living in Missoula. The fact that a fairly bustling town exists with a very thin boundary to complete wilderness. Its like a lonely atom floating in space. This underpass, accentuates this feeling as you are transported from one place to the other.

How could we represent this transition in an image? We were given the entrance and the exit, depending on where you're coming from, to paint. The viewer will see one image leaving town and a different one coming into town. This aspect would also lent itself to help our forming concept.

Wilderness versus Civilization. Is there a boundary, and what does it look like if there is? The images began to snowball from this question.

After four weeks of gathering imagery we finally composed an image for both sides of the tunnel. Read from right to left, the elements mirror the transition that happens when entering or leaving this place. Entering, the viewer experiences moving from a natural setting to one that is man made. Exiting, the viewer experiences leaving a technologically based environment into a reflection of the natural and an expansive view of the Missoula Valley. To take it one step further in each image, we have used elements as representations of this concept. Leaving town we have represented mountains using electrical conduit, and plant life as circuitry. Entering town, we have represented looking over a natural valley setting with man made objects such as railings, the Higgins St. bridge, and the tent in Caras Park. For a complete overview of this extensive mural project please visit:

<http://web.me.com/michael.parker1/Artreach/Welcome.html>



## **Sulphur Springs Theater**

### **with Community Stepping Stones Teen Program, 2010, 12'x35'**

Spring Hill and Sulphur Springs have a very unique history. To create an image that was representative of the spirit and place seemed fairly straightforward at first. Michael Parker along with the Youth Art Program of Community Stepping Stones began this project by finding residents who have spent their whole lives in the area and have seen generations come and go. They interviewed these residents informally and recorded their accounts of very specific things that happened in the neighborhood of spring hill. The spring that was used for recreational swimming by whites only and the runoff pond from an ice-making factory that was used for swimming for blacks, was a very clear account of the segregation within the area. We investigated many of these things and found that we were perhaps interviewing in a way that was revealing some sore spots within history. What we really wanted to know was how families were coexisting and what strengths the neighborhood used to survive. So the questions changed.

Education was a binder for the minority population in this neighborhood. Parents made it mandatory for children to be educated. Even beyond school, and equally as important, was the education that happened when community members would teach the younger population essential survival skills. Cooking, working on vehicles and taking care of your family members became a part of the education system within the threads of family and friends. This is what we found embodied the spirit of the time and place and that it was also something that is far removed today in the very same place.

We realized that there were almost no images of spring hill from a historical vantage point, and digging for images of this area proved to be somewhat fruitless. How would we begin to build an image from the accounts that we had heard? Was it possible to break down the stories that we gathered from the residents to single words that represented the spirit of life then, to be passed on to the residents of today? We felt it was not only possible but also appropriate. What we had were powerful stories that were able to give us one-word descriptions of the morals inherent in everyday life then, and hopefully now and the future. They felt like (these things) were what they had to give in order for their families to survive. We feel that this imagery that arose through stories and lessons were far more important than the landmarks and historical timeline of the neighborhood.

Taking our own photographs that illustrated some of the stories we heard then weaving them into the words that we had chosen proved to make a striking and very rich visual experience. This particular location for the painting was not going to hold a traditional image anyway. The image is specifically designed for this site and is meant to become a part of and compliment the place and landscape. Subtle color shifts and the optical shift from text to image were carefully considered.

The end result is a contemporary representation of all the positive things that the elders of this neighborhood would like to pass on to future generations. What an exciting concept: that the youth of today are passing on their elders' positive lessons, through public art, to the future in hopes that spirit will survive.



### **“Seasonal Vision” Medford, MA 2009 12”x25”**

This project was completed with teens from Medford, MA, a close suburb of Boston. This group was particularly interested in the way that we see seasonal changes. Using all senses to decipher environmental changes, we decided that a particularly powerful indicator is color.

This mural began by forming a group of youth, some good role models, and some at risk of being enveloped by the justice system for vandalism. We were to address a frequent graffiti problem in the neighborhood. When the local business owners realized that we were creating a positive reaction to something that was unnerving them for some time, they came out to help and encourage the teens. They immediately became proud that local kids were stepping up to do something about a negative situation. The energy increased drastically and the language shifted from “If I ever catch that kid...” to “This is a great solution. Thanks Great job.” One of the teens was actually hired by the organization that funded the mural. In this way the positive reaction reaches far beyond the image itself and reaches into the fabric of the community.

