



FLAG And Our Was Still There



by Rosemarie Steele and Stefanie Graves

WHEN KEY PEOPLE HAVE A CONVERGENCE OF MINDS IN A UNESCO CREATIVE CITY known as Quilt City something amazing is bound to emerge. Such was the case during QuiltWeek April 2015. Ro Morse and the late Bill Schroeder, the powerhouse team behind Paducah Wall to Wall murals, looked at the floodwall outside the Carroll Convention Center and thought it was the perfect setting for seeing quilts along the wall. Enter Mayor Gayle Kaler and the conversation ensued.

Before long Mayor Kaler invited department heads and community organizers to her office to discuss a Quilt Murals project. With initial assistance from the Wall to Wall project executive director Ro Morse and past chair Scott Garrett, who shared information on how the Wall to Wall Murals project developed, a new and separate plan was devised for the Quilt City USA murals.

Kaler saw this as an opportunity for local artists who moved here as part of the Artist Relocation Program to leave a legacy and have an impact on the community. Dr. Jay Downs Siska was named Project Coordinator and Char Downs, Pinecone Gallery, who had experience with outdoor murals, was recruited as Lead Artist. Downs soon devised a detailed juried audition process that required local artists to paint samples of “Corona II: Solar Eclipse” by Caryl Bryer Fallert-Gentry, the premier quilt featured in the project.

AQS Show Director Bonnie Browning organized a Quilt Selection Committee, which determined that quilts chosen for the project must reflect educational, humanitarian, or environmental relevance, or exhibit an iconic provenance to their time in history. “Corona II: Solar Eclipse,” named one of the The Twentieth Century’s Best American Quilts, was painted by Lead Artist Char Downs. The September 13, 2017, unveiling coincided with the historic celestial event Solar Eclipse 2017.

The second quilt in the series, “... and Our Flag was Still There!” created by world-renowned quilt artist and instructor Melinda Bula from California, was unveiled on Veterans Day, November 11, 2020. Bula describes this quilt as “a painting without any paint.” Muralist Stefanie Graves of Cowango Studios recreated Bula’s intricate thread-painting quilting style—using paint to replicate the fabric, stitches and thread. Following are her remarks from the unveiling in 2020.

“I’m so honored to have been chosen by Paducah Quilt Murals to paint this mural of Melinda Bula’s quilt, “And Our Flag Was Still There.” The quilt has always been one of my favorites from seeing it for the first time at the National Quilt Museum here in Paducah.

Painting this mural has been the most challenging and largest project I’ve ever accomplished in my art career — over 900 hours total and nearly a year and a half to completion. It was a long, and many times, tedious process but also incredibly rewarding in the end.

As with any of my paintings with this much realistic detail, I become

intimately familiar with the subject I’m painting. This was no exception.

Over the course of the time I spent working on it, I couldn’t help but reflect on the quilt’s meaning for me and how appropriate it felt to be spending my time on this mural at this particular moment in history. “And Our Flag Was Still There” is a line from the Star Spangled Banner that reminds us of our first struggles in forming our democracy. Melinda Bula’s image brilliantly captures that moment with a tattered American flag still rippling in the aftermath of battle, even as smoke and fire surround it. It is torn but defiantly remains aloft.

Working on this mural made me think of not only that initial struggle but also our many other struggles in preserving our democracy, such as the Civil War, two World Wars, Vietnam, and our fight for civil rights that our country has survived. During these past months of political turmoil I came to find hope through this mural with its reminder of our internal strength as a nation and our unwavering faith in our democracy. It also reminded me of all those who have come before who fought for this union and for these beliefs. Their strength and sacrifices, in the face of sometimes overwhelming adversity, gave me cause for hope.

The mural and quilt also remind us that art is more than just pretty pictures. In art’s most powerful sense it serves to inspire us, to make us question, to reflect on issues in a way that words cannot convey. I’m proud to be part of a community that celebrates that tradition and honored

to bring to life an image that is the epitome of art’s greatest purpose.

Thank you so much for being a part of this momentous unveiling. And thank you to all the veterans today for your service, especially you, Daddy.” **P**



Muralist,
Stefanie Graves

A PATRIOTIC PRAYER

Ten years ago, I was desperate to make a quilt that would help me through the fear of my son becoming a United States Marine in a time of war. I prayed over every piece of fabric I cut and every thread I stitched that my son would be safe. Dealing with that fear and learning to let them go...that is how you learn to be a patriot. The hidden blessing is that this quilt connected me to so many other Americans that have prayed that same prayer. Now this quilt is in The National Quilt Museum and painted on the wall of a city I truly love... Paducah. I’m so grateful.

—QUILTER MELINDA BULA