



ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

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LINCOLN ELEMENTARY MURAL BY CHRIS JOHNSON OFFICIALLY UNVEILED

Georgia Council for the Arts Grant to Albany Museum of Art Funded Project

[For Release Sept 13, 2019 – Albany, GA] – Lincoln Elementary Magnet School, Dougherty County School System and the Albany Museum of Art on Friday, Sept 13, 2019 officially unveiled a large, eight-panel mural created by Christopher Johnson, an artist from Columbus.

The mural, which evokes the works of Henri Matisse, was funded through a \$5,000 Vibrant Communities Grant that the Albany Museum of Art was awarded by the Georgia Council for the Arts. The AMA was one of 78 recipients in 52 Georgia counties that received a combined \$300,000 in fiscal year 2018-19. Johnson completed the mural in May 2019, but with the school's busy schedule as the 2018-19 school year nearing its end, the unveiling ceremony was scheduled for the current school year.

Lincoln Principal Dr. Shawn Davidson conducted a brief assembly Friday morning in the school's gymnasium, where he introduced the student body to Johnson. Davidson then led the students outside for photographs with the artist. The mural is painted on eight large recesses on the south wall of the gym.

"Art is critical for the development of the whole child and we are grateful for our relationship with the Albany Museum of Art," said Dougherty County School System Superintendent Kenneth Dyer, who attended the event. "Mr. Johnson's work is incredible and is a great example for our students.

“The AMA is a valued partner of the district and we appreciate all they do to both promote art education and to give exposure to our students.”

Chloe Hinton, director of development and membership for the AMA, said the mural is another way that the museum takes art out to the community.

“Murals are one powerful way that art can bring the community together,” Hinton said. “Chris’ mural features bright, positive imagery that conveys the two important themes of community and unity.

“As a Partner in Excellence with Lincoln Elementary, the AMA’s goal is to strengthen and enrich the instructional programs in the school, helping ensure that every student graduates with the skills, knowledge and attitude required for lifelong learning. These students are tomorrow’s leaders, and what they learn and experience today will impact the future for generations.”

The mural is easily seen by motorists on North Monroe Street, which is a heavily traveled, one-way street leading north from downtown toward Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital. It also can be viewed from the 500 block of Tift Avenue, an east-west street that intersects Monroe.

“I loved seeing the enthusiasm from the kids,” said Annie Vanoteghem, director of education and public programming for the AMA. “The questions they had for Chris were insightful and they were extremely excited to meet the artist who created the pictures they have seen every day since the new school year began.”

Johnson said he was responding to a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) education theme when he planned the imagery. “And I was looking at Matisse and I wanted to evoke his work—simple, playful, bright and colorful,” Johnson said.

Vanoteghem said she thinks that will be beneficial to the students.

“You might not think of art when you consider those other subjects,” she said, “but exposure to art gives you a different perspective that proves tremendously valuable when you are working in areas like engineering and technology. It broadens your thinking and inspires you to greater things.”

The panels are distinct, yet interconnected in tone, color and style. Johnson focused on the use of vibrant colors with stylized images of faces, people, hands, birds, flowers, sun, moon and even raindrops. The images are whimsical and friendly, leaving interpretation to the viewer.

“It was exciting working around the kids,” Johnson said of the work. “They had all kinds of questions. They were excited somebody was out here doing something.

“Coming back today, it’s really cool to see them respond in such a positive way. They don’t hide it. They tell you exactly what they think. When they tell you good things, you know that’s genuine.”

Johnson said he was thinking of ways to brighten the campus when he was designing the images.

“You can read all kinds of things into it, and kids have a great imagination, so I’m always excited to hear what they think about it,” he said.

Several of the students at the morning ceremony gave ringing endorsements for the mural.

“What I think about it is it’s beautiful,” student Nariah Fletcher said. “I like how he sketched it, stayed in the lines and colored it, and how he was so neat with it.”

“I like the artwork he did on the walls,” Trinity McCrary added. “I think it goes good with the school. I like the way that he drew it.”

Sydney Berg said she liked the mural “because they’re great pictures. They’re just colorful and bright and they make the school look good.”

Johnson’s work as a muralist can be seen through much of South and West Georgia, as well as the Carolinas. Johnson is assistant professor of visual art at Andrew College in Cuthbert, where he is director of the college’s Visual Art Program.

Despite its large scale, he completed the Lincoln Elementary project in a six-day period. “I thought that was pretty fast,” he said.

Johnson typically works in the mediums of wood carving, printmaking, painting, drawing and sculpture. He said he began painting large outdoor murals after Andrew College reshaped its mission.

“We (Andrew) wanted to be the spiritual and cultural uplift for the community, not just the college,” he said. “We’ve made a lot of inroads into the community and established this initiative where we’re going to do rural revitalization through the arts. We go into a community, assess the needs and look for possible places for murals.” Once a project is approved by a local government, he said, he seeks funding sources for the it.

The Lincoln Elementary mural is one of two he has created in Albany, with the other—a farm scene—on a building at the corner of Jefferson Street and West Oglethorpe Boulevard. He also has painted murals in the Georgia cities of Columbus, Cuthbert, Dawson, Shellman, Tifton and Arlington, and in Pickens, S.C., and Trinity, N.C. The Columbus piece he recently completed on the five-story Heritage Tower building covered 3,500 square feet.

The Georgia Council for the Arts received 100 applications from libraries, schools, arts centers, cities, historical societies, community theatres, Boys & Girls Clubs and others during the 2018-19 grant year.

“This grant program seeks to advance art projects that support non-profit organizations, government entities, colleges/universities, libraries and schools in their efforts to present cultural opportunities and arts experiences in their communities,” Georgia Council for the Arts Executive Director Karen Paty said.

Following the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) precedent, the Georgia Council for the Arts used Peer Review Panels to adjudicate applications. These panels included fellow professionals who are experienced in the arts discipline or type of grant being reviewed; or are Georgia citizens with a record of involvement in arts activities, experience, and knowledge.

The Georgia Council for the Arts (GCA) is a division of the Georgia Department of Economic Development whose mission is to cultivate the growth of vibrant, thriving Georgia communities through the arts. GCA provides grant funding, programs and services statewide that support the vital arts industry, preserve the state’s cultural heritage, increase tourism and nurture strong communities. Funding for Georgia Council for the Arts is provided by appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts.

CURRENT AMA EXHIBITIONS

- *Figure Forward*, works by Jill Frank, Jaime Bull and William Downs, is in the Haley Gallery through Oct 12, 2019.
- *Educators as Artists: Juried College Faculty Exhibition* is in the East Gallery through Oct 12, 2019.
- *Fragments of a Violent World*, nano photography by Michael Oliveri, is in the West Gallery through Oct 12, 2019.

ABOUT THE ALBANY MUSEUM OF ART

The Albany Museum of Art, located in Albany, Georgia, adjacent to Albany State University West Campus just off Gillionville Road is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Albany Museum of Art is open 10 am through 5 pm Tuesdays through Fridays and noon until 5 pm on Saturdays. Admission is free.

For more information about the AMA please visit our website, www.albanymuseum.com or call 229.439.8400. Be sure to follow the @AlbanyArtMuseum on Twitter, AlbanyMuseum on Instagram and AlbanyMuseumOfArt on Facebook.

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