

CONVERSATIONS

SPRING 2020

Businesses across the nation have boarded their storefronts due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Artists have utilized these new canvases, and, over a four-month period, cities have seen new pieces of public art, both commissioned and gorilla. Overwhelmingly, these new artworks have been messages of resilience, working together, and reminding the country to wear masks and socially distance.

MAY 29, 2020 – MAY 31, 2020

In Fort Wayne, IN on Friday evening, organizers planned an “I Can’t Breathe” protest at the Allen County Courthouse green to demand justice for George Floyd and protest police brutality in the United States. Floyd was an unarmed black man who was killed in police custody in Minneapolis. The former officer, Derek Chauvin, who knelt on Floyd’s neck for several minutes now faces murder charges in Floyd’s death.

Protests across the country resulted in peaceful discourse. In some cases, vandals damaged property. Properties boarded their windows and covered their store fronts. The newly boarded windows coupled with the power of the Black Lives Matter movement resulted new canvases for Artists. Artists around the nation began to paint images and messages of hope, love, justice and police reform.

Protests in Fort Wayne on Friday night and Saturday night went from peaceful to destructive, with police shooting tear gas to disperse activists and nearly 100 people arrested. Windows were broken and some businesses suffered damage.

The Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District, FWDID, orchestrated a volunteer core on Saturday and Sunday morning to clean up broken glass, help property owners assess damages, remove damaged streetscape, and pick up trash. Over the weekend, businesses in Downtown Fort Wayne covered broken windows with plywood. Some businesses preemptively covered their windows.

On Sunday, May 31, Alyssum Montessori worked with local artist, Adam Garland, to facilitate murals on their plywood covered windows. These were messages that spoke directly to the Black Lives Matter movement.

JUNE 1, 2020 - JUNE 7, 2020

Over the next week the FWDID reached out to businesses with boards on their facades and asked them for permission to paint their plywood covered windows too. The FWDID’s Art This Way program went to work reaching out to artists and building parameters for the June 6th and 7th Plywood Paint Out. A large majority of the businesses of Downtown Fort Wayne participated and almost 90 artists and volunteers showed up over that weekend to install works of art on the plywood. The FWDID paid artists a stipend for their work to help cover the costs of supplies and compensate them for their time. The Conversations collection represents over half of the works that were created by artists during this Plywood Paint Out. This collection is not available for purchase. A committee has been compiled to determine the best way to preserve these works and decide their future.

OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM YOUR FORT WAYNE DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT, FWDID

Dear Fort Wayne Community,

It is an honor to serve Downtown Fort Wayne and our Fort Wayne community. It is not news that these last few months have been the “times that try our souls”, but in true Fort Wayne fashion you are all proving that we are truly in this together. Both with the Coronavirus shutdown and now the public protests over the brutal and unnecessary death of George Floyd, we have faced challenging and unprecedented times. Racism and economic inequality continue to be enduring challenges to making Fort Wayne truly great. We have been able as a community to successfully confront our past challenges and collaborate on finding a solution; this must be our path forward with these issues as well. We know and welcome the fact that Downtown serves as the podium for our public discourse; for protest as well as for celebration, mourning as well as rejoicing. We hope that the voices now raised Downtown are truly heard. While our businesses are important, our people are more important. A broken window can be repaired, but a lost life cannot. We want Downtown Fort Wayne to continue to be the “vibrant, urban core of Northeast Indiana” – this weekend’s passion, both for change and for healing, showed that is exactly what we are.

We will continue to work to make Downtown Fort Wayne the heart of Northeast Indiana; the place that draws people, hopes, businesses, families, and dreams. We commit to building an environment where all can succeed, and a place that we can all be proud to call our home.

We love you, Fort Wayne. We see you. We hear you. We are honored to be the place where you are coming together to talk about differences and unifying to build a better future, one in which every person is valued equally. Black lives matter.

We look forward to seeing you all again in your Downtown neighborhood.

Sincerely,
The Downtown Improvement District

PLYWOOD PAINT OUT PARTICIPATING ARTISTS*

Theoplis Smith • Adeline Griswold • Jared Andrews • Jeff Pilkinton • Jasmine Christenson
Jeremy Stroup • Rachel Von Stroup • Grace Harmin • Dan Swartz • Brian Moss • Amber Kessler
Freer Julie Wall • Jasmine Gilbreath • Jasmine Pilkinton • Isis Shaw • Alyssa Deck
Sedrick Lorick • Ian Summers • Nancy Fritz • Kate Long • Adam Garland • Matt Plett
Megan Hevel • Jordan Kurzen • Rob Mayher • Sarah Gayle • Andrew Dubach
Malia Ross • Jack Ellsworth • Liberty Storms

*This list represents artists who registered to be involved in the project. Not all participating artists are listed. Not all artworks are represented in this collection.

