

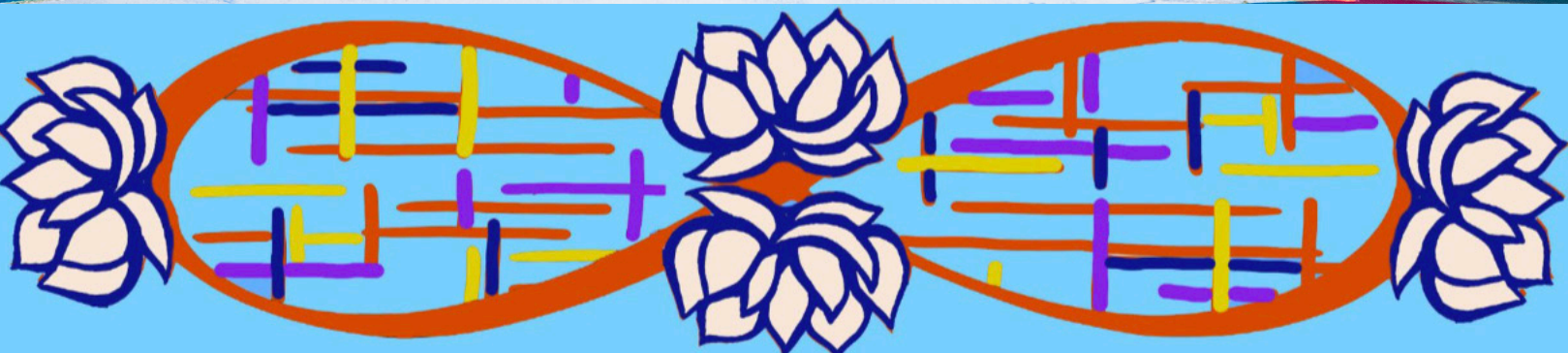


**SNAP\_SHOT**

**copywrite**  
MAGAZINE

# Redefining “Street” Art

CROSS/WORDS/NORTH MURAL  
INTERVIEW W/ COMMUNITY



**There is art in these streets. LITERALLY!**

**Beautification projects have been popping up all over Milwaukee. Sculptures, murals, installations, and more have become a part of the growing public narrative that art has a significant impact on the community.**

However, even though some forms of art create aesthetic dialogues, others work as functioning methods of civic engagement. A new street mural project between the crosswalks bordering North Avenue, on Palmer St. and Hubbard St., addresses a real problem we all have noticed; reckless driving.

The project entitled Cross/Words/North “is a unique community-based art project that brings together students and families from nearby St.Marcus Lutheran School, neighbors living in the Harambee and Riverwest neighborhoods near North Avenue, and several community organizations, to create four pieces of crosswalk-framed art that express their feelings about the neighborhood.”- their press release noted.

Each crosswalk features an image that is symbolic of a distinct word: Empowerment, Love, Unity, and Diversity. Throughout several weeks of virtual workshops with partnering organizations Artists Working in Education (AWE) and Safe & Sound, the words and images were selected in collaboration with community stakeholders including students, parents, and residents. CopyWrite joined this amazing group of community members on installation day (July 17th, 2021) to see why this form of street art is more than what meets the eye.

Three youth artists D.J. White, Joshua Fuentes, and Jazale Hill gave us their perspectives on why

the Cross/Words/North project is worthy of their time and space in their community.

**CW:** “You are all here working very hard on this community project. Why did you decide to be a part of this?”

**D.J.:** “I really like art. I like all of the colors and how the pictures tell a story.”

**Jazale:** “I decided to be a part of this to address the safety of driving. It’s also something positive to do in the summer that I actually like.”

**Joshua:** “I just really like helping.”

Not only did these youth artists help in the physical application of the painted murals but also were extremely involved in the design of the crosswalks. Both Joshua and Jazale released artist statements about their designs.

“The houses represent Diversity, as we live in a community where we are all individuals but we are uniquely different. The houses I drew are all homes but each is unique. I wanted to include details such as the porches because, in neighborhoods like mine, this became a space during the Covid-19 Pandemic of togetherness. We were able to talk to our neighbors from the porch and wave to each other while being safer at home,” - Joshua Fuentes

“I feel that the infinity sign and lotus flower conveys the word empowerment well. The infinity sign symbolizes a forever bond. As a community even through tough times we will always be together and work things out in order to live better. The lotus flower symbolizes the work that still needs to be done that will eventually bloom into a greater City of Milwaukee, a better place for us. As a resident of Milwaukee, I want things to be better for my younger siblings, family, friends, and even just people in general. I want my work to make a difference and empower others to feel safe during their everyday life. Being involved by addressing safety concerns of

## REDEFINING “STREET” ART

reckless driving in Milwaukee is a start to doing that. This way I know I helped people I care about be a little more safe. I know my work is a part of something bigger than myself.” - Jazale Hill

D.J. added that though he was originally coerced into being a part of the project once involved he began to understand how the project could be a service to others and enjoyable.

**D.J.:** “This project matters because you get to be creative while helping against reckless driving. The project was inspired by ourselves and what we wanted to see. It’s important because we are drawing them and that makes it personal.”

As reflective as these youth were about the visual imagery of the project they also had thoughts on the safety of their community when it comes to “trendy” dangerous driving habits plaguing our city. The colloquial word for reckless driving is baselining. The act of baselining and increase of delinquent car theft has made fatality by motor vehicle and incapacitated injury surge over the last few years. Milwaukee’s Traffic Safety Unit (TSU) reports that year to date there have been 215 incidents that have drastically changed someone’s thread of existence, with harm or death (2021).

**Joshua:** “I usually feel safe but at the same time I don’t go outside a lot because there have been two accidents by my house already.”

**CW:** “Why would that keep you from going outside?”

**Joshua:** “I’m afraid that I might get hit.”

Though the narrative may always unfold with negative statistics tabulating real-world issues as numbers, this “street” art is a reminder to ease up on the speed, the dangerous maneuvers, and focus on the world around us.

**Jazale:** “I think it will inspire people to slow down in a positive way and look at the beauty.”

But what sparks this plan for communally combative street art?

Greg St. Arnold, a resident and “avid biker”, too had noticed the risk of traveling on city streets. People swerving in and out of traffic, near misses, and stories of collisions are all enough to make any commuter wary. Listening to the City-County Carjacking and Reckless Driving Task Force report, Greg realized that the issue was something that needed actionable attention and could possibly be addressed through collaborative means. He then reached out to Mark Lisowski, community organizer for Safe & Sound, to see how they could create something in the neighborhood that would make the highly traveled streets more bike and pedestrian-friendly.

With a solid idea in hand, they were awarded the City of Milwaukee’s Reckless Driving Mini-Grant, which allowed them to facilitate creative community development workshops through AWE and Lead artist Stephanie Krellwitz.

**Greg:** “From there on I was a participant in the process. The Zoom sessions were awesome and a good discussion of what each community stakeholder would like the art to represent.”

In the same way, the youth artists were reflective of reckless driving in our community, Greg too shared thoughts on the impact it may have on them.

**Greg:** “Who are the people that are reckless driving? It’s young people. So what better way to address that than have them involved”.

He also cited that projects like this have been



### DIVERSITY



pitched in other parts of the city-backed by real research that suggests arts ability to curb more dangerous driving activity. However, not all projects get approved and many people want to know why.

**Greg:** “Some people don’t think that the money the city is giving out to address reckless driving is enough. But as a community member, I’m excited to get a grant like this even if it’s small. This is an opportunity to directly connect with local government and do something that can actually serve the community.”

As stakeholders in the creative community and supporters of the local, we had to ask Greg if he too has noticed an increase of public art in Milwaukee as a method of civic engagement and where it may be coming from.

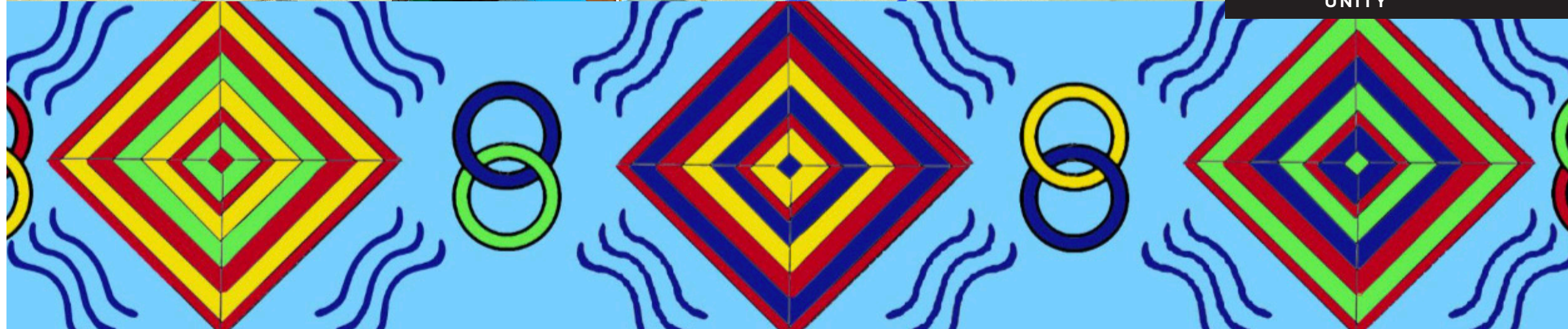
**Greg:** “I have noticed more public art and I’m seeing more murals around. I think there has been an uptake in awareness, engagement, and activism. There seems to be a link between that and now people are more continuous on how it creates impact. I hope that’s the case. I hope I’m not just imagining this.”

As society shifts into more public acts of accountability, so must the way we combat negative actions like reckless driving and practice acts of social responsibility. A part of this shift is using language and symbolism to communicate what we stand for as communities. Redefining “street” art as a way to slow down baselining, bring comfort to our residents, and save a few more lives, is just one way we can cross the road together.

See you in these streets.

**Lexi S. Brunson /CW**

Milwaukee Police Department Traffic Safety Unit. (2021, June 9). TSU Statistics. Traffic Safety Unit. <https://mpdtsu.org/tsustatistics/>.



LOVE

UNITY

