

Local Artist and UGA Student Unites Athens Community with Inclusivity Mural

Ever since she was a little kid, Tori Watson fondly recalls doodling on any surface she could get her hands on. Now, she's one of seven artists hand-selected by Athens-Clarke County to design a mural that will soon be visible to anybody strolling, driving, or biking past West Clayton Street and West Washington Street.



A photograph of Tori Watson sitting at a table outside. Watson is one of seven local artists selected to develop her personal design for the Athens Mural Alley Project. (Photo Courtesy/Tori Watson)

According to her [biography](#) as a Dodd Ambassador for the Lamar Dodd School of Art, Tori Watson is currently a third-year student at the University of Georgia studying both art history and comparative literature. Although she's still ironing out all the specific details, she hopes to include her passion for art in her future career in any way possible. For now, Watson is looking forward to using this mural project as an opportunity to publicly express her voice through her art.

"I try to view art as a form of activism," said Watson. "I think art can be very powerful in that it's a great tool that allows people to experience someone else's life experiences firsthand, without words. And I think that's very powerful."

In a [press release](#) previously made by the Athens-Clarke

County government, the Athens Mural Alley Project is described as a "walk-by, bike-by art experience, viewable from outside and perfect for social distancing" and encouraged local artists to represent the strength of the Athens community in the face of the numerous challenges of the past year. The project was established in collaboration between the Athens Area Council For Arts, the Athens Downtown Development Authority, and the Lyndon House Arts Center.

The official theme of the project to be reflected within each artist's design is "2021, Here and Now", with the murals being painted on panels by the individual artists



Another example of artist Tori Watson's previous artwork, a digital drawing of a woman with her head tilted back surrounded by other doodles. (Courtesy/Tori Watson)

before affixed to brick walls along a visible alley in downtown Athens. These murals are expected to be publicly installed and available for the public to enjoy by the end of June 2021, and will be kept up for at least three years.

“Public art just makes a place more interesting. It reflects the personality of Athens, we’re a very arts-oriented community, and we like to reflect that in all of our surroundings,” said Tatiana Veneruso, Public Art Coordinator for ACC Leisure Services, on the importance of public art in shaping the cultural landscape of downtown Athens.

Titled by the artist as “Give Love. Together”, the inspiration behind Tori Watson’s mural was to create an uplifting message to encourage her local community against the recent violence and discrimination she’s noticed particularly affecting targeted minority groups. The focus of her art specifically celebrates the strength in resistance against racial injustices and highlights the adapted pride flag, updated by Daniel Quasar for wider inclusion of Black, Brown, and transgender voices in the LGBTQ+ community.



The mural idea designed by artist Tori Watson for the Athens Mural Alley Project; it reads “Give Love. Together.” and features two hands in front of flowers and the pride flag. Portrayed in grayscale, the hands are intentionally left racially ambiguous by the artist to emphasize the united meaning of the piece.
(Courtesy/Tori Watson)



A photograph of artist Tori Watson, a third-year art history and comparative literature major, proudly holding up one of her previous artworks, a black-and-white rendition of a woman framing her face.
(Photo Courtesy/Tori Watson)

“I just wanted to kind of represent all the different communities we have and that regardless of your identity, you fit in here in Athens and we should all love each other for who we are, regardless of who we are, and just give love,” Watson said. The artist emphasized her message being one meant to encourage sharing unity and support for one another, regardless of differing identities or appearances.

Whenever not developing her latest art project, Tori Watson is equally as passionate about her service as the co-president of UNICEF at UGA, a humanitarian group dedicated to ensuring that children everywhere can have safe, healthy childhoods that allow them to

reach their full potential. According to Watson, she is very proud of the student organization recently fundraising just under \$1,500 for COVAX, the global effort to accelerate the development of the COVID-19 vaccine as well as guarantee free and equal access to it in every country.

“As I've progressed in my involvement with the organization, I've watched UNICEF clubs give other students a sense of empowerment and purpose in the face of overwhelming global issues,” said Victoria Fonzi, Watson’s fellow co-president for UNICEF at UGA speaking on her own experiences as a leader within the club. “I continue to be inspired by the resourcefulness I see from club members in making change possible, whether that means sacrificing weekends to make a bake sale happen or boldly asking professors to be pied in the face for the cause.”

For others interested in pursuing their own dreams or goals but uncertain how to begin, Tori Watson encourages overcoming a fear of rejection with a positive mentality, and to “take the plunge” of putting yourself out there and simply seeing what opportunities will come your way as a result.



A photograph of artist Tori Watson, a third-year art history and comparative literature major, kneeling and pointing to a previous black-and-white art piece of hers. Watson is one of seven artists selected for the Athens Mural Alley Project. (Photo Courtesy/Tori Watson)