

Wabash Arts Corridor / Big Walls / 2016

Photography by Sandra Steinbrecher



Introduction

In 2013, Columbia College Chicago launched the Wabash Arts Corridor to bring street art to the South Loop. It was the bright idea and inspiration of Mark Kelly, former VP for Student Success at the College and now Commissioner of Cultural Affairs and Special Events for the city of Chicago. "This is an incredible cultural district that no one has ever recognized," he said in *The Chicagoist*, in April, 2016. "The WAC saw this transformation using street art and installations and media to bring the district to life and then the idea itself would be a way to bring all of our neighbors together."

Now, over 40 murals can be found on Wabash Avenue, from Van Buren Street to Roosevelt Road and from Michigan Avenue to State Street. In May 2016, 17 new murals were installed in just a few weeks by local and international artists, for Columbia's Big Walls street art festival.

I photographed the murals of the Big Walls 2016 Project as well as many of the artists working during their installation process. Street artists have a special relationship with the public and with public spaces; they communicate with everyday people outside of a traditional art context. It was also an opportunity to spotlight existing historic buildings, which form the canvases for the contemporary art.

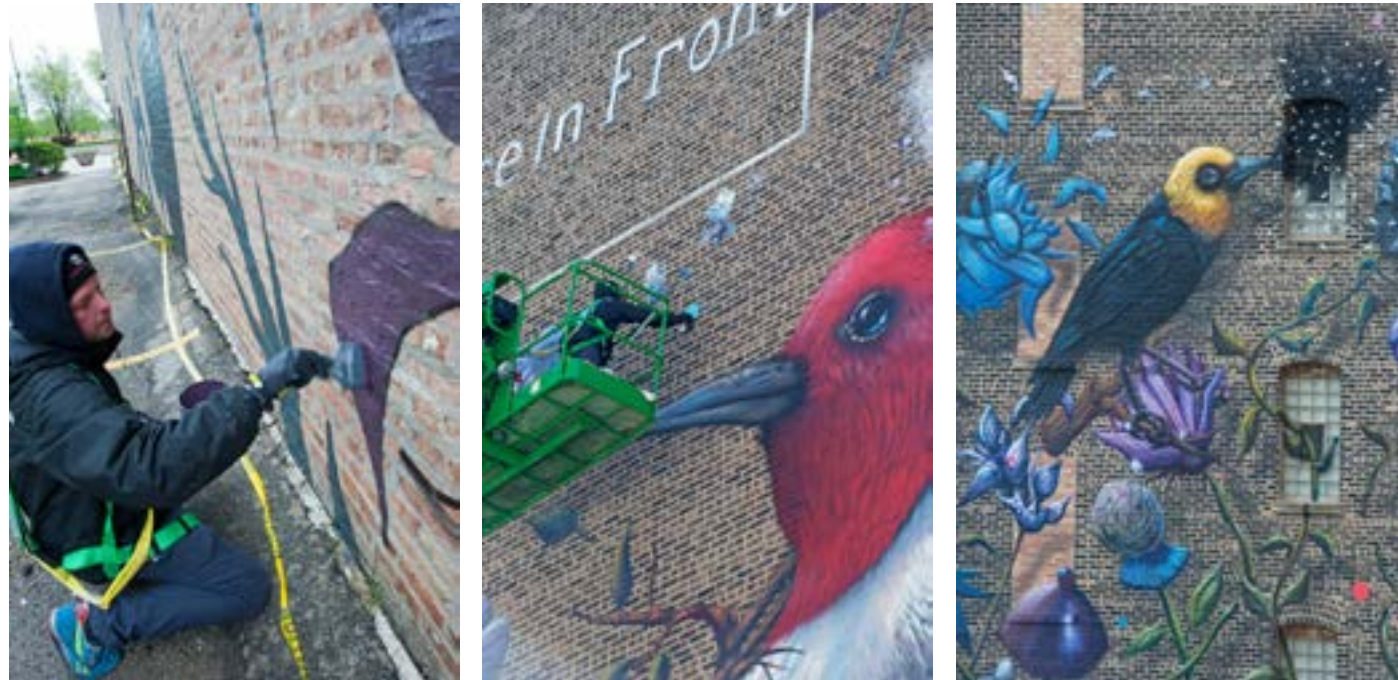
Street art is powerful, compelling and a worldwide movement. Here in Chicago, these works comprise a love letter to Wabash Avenue, transforming the street, once considered the back alley of Michigan Avenue, into a destination.

Sandra Steinbrecher

December 2016

Collin van der Sluijs

Netherlands, age 36



For the piece in Chicago, I did quite a lot of research on endangered species of birds and ones who need preservation. For the background of the wall I chose a red-headed woodpecker and a yellow-headed blackbird; they really stand out on the bricks. In general my work is about situations I get myself into, or stories that interest me, from other people, and from things around me in daily life.

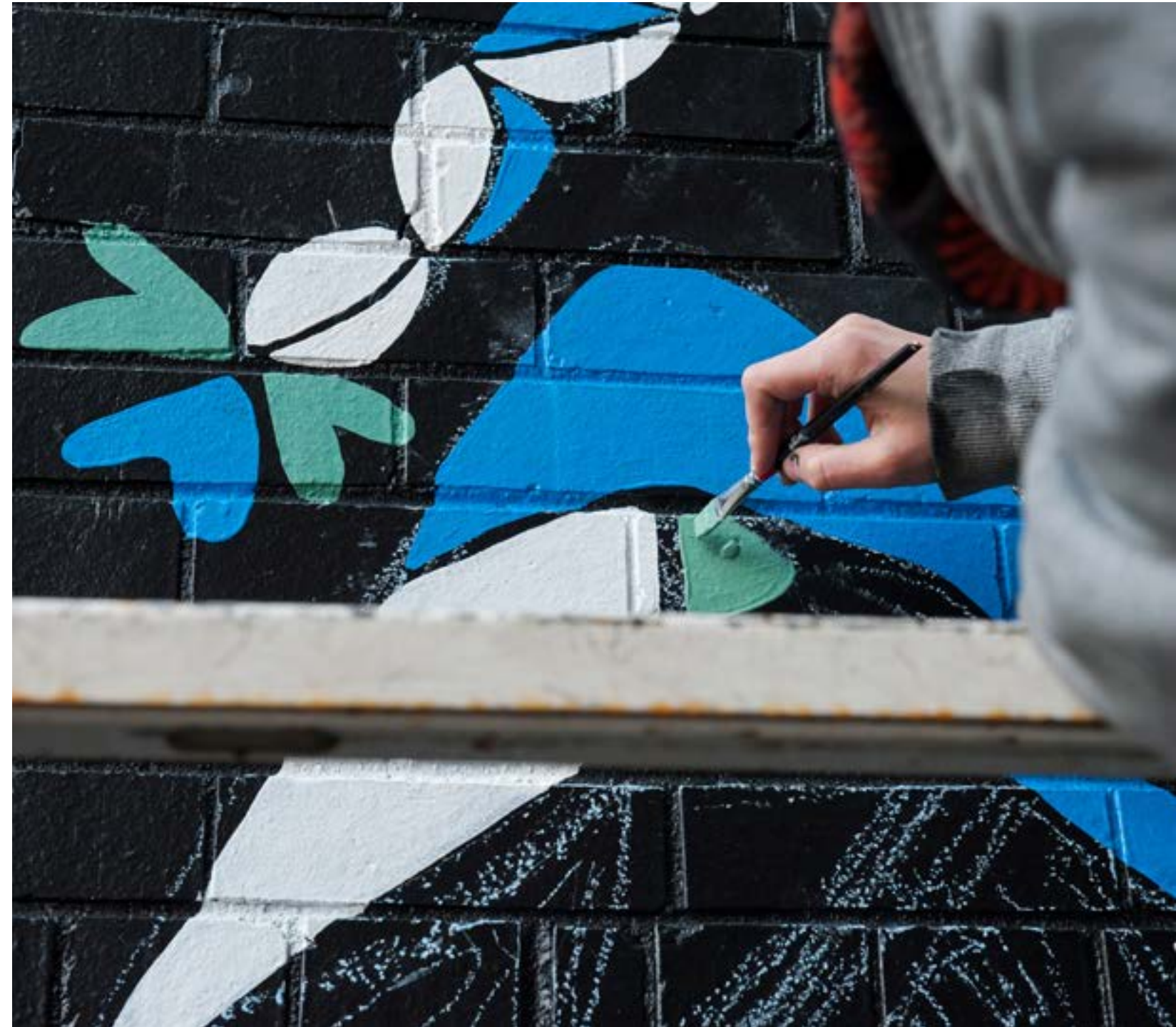
I am really happy to create a work of this size in public space that doesn't try to sell you something, but makes you aware of something. So to me, it is important to give people a voice in public space, with an installation or painting. Public art contributes to civic life because it is a reflection of the time or period in which it is made and the location where it is placed.

From Doom to Boom 1006 S. Michigan Avenue ▶



ZorZorZor

USA, age 26



The inspiration for the WAC wall piece is my culture and where I come from. My parents moved to Chicago from southern Poland in the 70's. We are Highlanders or in Polish "Gorale." I chose to paint a dancing couple dressed in traditional "Goralskie" costume. I have always loved the tradition ingrained in me. As a child, I especially loved the special occasions where we would all dress up and celebrate together as Highlanders. Having the opportunity to paint a wall in downtown Chicago, I really wanted to take advantage and paint something for my people.

What I would like to see improve... maybe more diversity, more risk taking, being more daring with "street work," myself included. Just more, more, more. Maybe more originality, more outside the box... "holysht, damn! dope." work... rather than a lot of the same sort of stuff... I guess I can only really answer this on a personal level but relate it as a whole. I'd like to connect more with others, physically and through the viewers' eyes seeing my work, so, as a city, I would love to see the same... more connection. Real connection.

Góralu, czy ci nie żal? 600 S. Michigan Avenue - alley ►



Tararchy

USA, age 41



The images of people at peace, in yoga poses, are meant to inspire and suggest peace. The snake is a rich symbol in our collective unconscious and is meant as a reminder of our "darkside," the ego, man vs... Depicted to acknowledge its existence without judgement.

An overwhelming amount of imagery we are exposed to on a daily basis, through media and advertising, is meant to induce and/or capitalize on feelings of lack and desire. Public art has a more genuine intention whether it's education, commemoration or beautification. It's visual stimulation with a positive frequency that contributes to a more positive environment.

Public art is a reflection of civic life. Like the clothes a person wears.

Ella + Pitr

France, ages 32 / 32



Our inspiration for the Native American of Chicago is the roots of America. Chicago is an old native name and the story of the city is directly linked with native people. I usually look for stories about the wall and the building and people from the streets. I thought people would be worried about the sketch because it could seem sad, but nobody ever tried to change it. Public art is important for cities; it proves people are free to express themselves.



Eduardo Kobra

Brazil, age 40



From *StreetArtNews*, July 2016:

Muddy Waters is a legend. My murals have just this purpose, to coordinate historical facts, creating portals to cities in the past and to personalities who were important in the history of mankind. No doubt Muddy changed the world scenario of the Blues.

From *In the Studio: Brazilian Street Artist Kobra*, a film by Stephen J. Grant:

We artists cannot be silent and close our eyes to the issues that are going on around us. I believe that by using public spaces and talking openly about these issues, we can really create awareness in one person, one neighborhood, one city or one country.

Memory Wall: Muddy Waters 17 N. State Street ►





Marina Zumi

Argentina, age 33



My motivation comes in my daily life. I try to reflect human behavior through natural and animal scenes. City life can be too boxed in, too gray, too violent, too polluted. I want people to feel for just a minute what it's like to be in contact with nature.

Chicago has a long history of street and public art; even Picasso is there. There is a beautiful rhythm, in the music, the culture and the trains floating all over the city.

Public art gives everybody a chance to have a piece of art for their own and to feel good about their community. It doesn't matter if you are wealthy or not, you can feel something about it, own it and show it with pride. Art makes us more unified.



Acknowledgments

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Patrick Hull / Vertical Gallery
Jenni Button / Matthew Rachman Gallery
Kimberly Leja Atwood / Elephant Room Gallery
Sara M. Dulkan / Chicago Truborn Gallery

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Thanks to all building managers, engineers, security guards and residents who gave me access to rooftops and terraces to photograph the murals around the South Loop. What a view!

Big Walls 2016 Artists / Wall Address / Title / Contact

Collin van der Sluijs / 1006 S. Michigan Ave / From Doom to Boom / www.collinvandersluijs.com

ZorZorZor / 600 S. Michigan Ave-alley / Góralu, czy ci nie żal? / Highlander, Do You Not Regret? / @zzzalwayz

Tararchy / 72 E. 11th Street / Who Do You Love / www.tararchy.com

Ella + Pitr / 537 S. Wells / Native American / www.ellapitr.com

Eduardo Kobra / 17 N. State Street / Memory Wall: Muddy Waters / www.eduardokobra.com

Marina Zumi / 910 S. Michigan Ave / Impossible Meeting / www.flickr.com/marina-zumi-art/

Ruben Aguirre / 525 S. Wabash / Drowning in the City / [@likes_1](http://www.theshiftchange.com)

Renee Robbins / 1130 S. Michigan Ave / X Marks the Milky Way / www.reneerobbins.com

Czr Prz / 1415 S. Wabash / Fry / www.flickr.com/czrprz

Hera / 916 S. Wabash / Imagine We Could Just Tolerate Each Other's Differences / www.herakut.com

DMNOLOGY / 618 S. Wabash / ChicagOriginal / [@dmnology](http://www.onesheet.com/dmnology)

Lady Lucx + Sarah Stewart / 515 S. Wabash / Untitled / @ladylucx

Justus Roe / 1001 S. State Street / Standing Wave / www.justusroe.com

Amuse 126 / 777 S. State Street / High Tide / www.126digital.com

Don't Fret / 1152 S. Wabash / Untitled / www.dontfretart.com

Andrea Dunn / 623 S. Wabash / The Peacock / www.andreadunn.com

Ricky Lee Gordon / 634 S. Wabash / I Am You, You Are Me / www.rickyleegordon.com