

Yatika Fields creates Memorial Park mural, the first public art commission for the city of Siloam Springs, Arkansas



On November 11, 2019, Yatika Starr Fields began working on the highly anticipated War Memorial Park mural in the City of Siloam Springs, Arkansas. The painter and artist of American Indian descent finished the massive painting in just over a week. Fields branched into murals as an expansion of his own painting, “everyone gets to see it, and everyone gets to have a hand in it, and everyone gets to own it,” says the artist, during his previous mural in Bentonville, commissioned by the Crystal Bridges museum. His process does not include sketches; Fields approaches each mural as a dialogue between himself and the wall.

ARTIST SELECTION FOR THE CITY’S FIRST PUBLIC ART COMMISSION

Forecast was engaged by the city to help plan public art for their new park, create the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a 100-foot retaining wall in the park—the city’s first public art commission—and facilitate the selection process.

Fields, who grew up in nearby Tahlequah, Oklahoma, was selected by a committee of community members and area artists. The artist impressed the committee with his extensive experience, and his excitement to incorporate his Osage heritage and personal local connection into the design. The committee overwhelmingly selected Fields as their preferred choice, based on “his observations of the context of the site, his strong desire to develop a work that was very specific to this location, and his high artistic excellence. They debated over the decision to select an artist with a vision and a process, rather than a design, accepting that Fields’ process, and his philosophy (and his strong body of past achievement) was an ideal fit for this opportunity” says *Forecast* Founder and Lead Principal Consultant, Jack Becker.

THE PROJECT, AND ARTIST COMMENTS

As part of the project, the artist held a free talk at the library in the park, where he spoke about his inspiration, process and life as a painter and muralist. Fields also offered a workshop for local art students to create their own original art and inspire passion for the arts in the next generation. The paintings the students made were donated to the high school.

The city believes that the colorful mural, a highlight of the new downtown park that opened in May of 2019, will be an iconic landmark for both residents and tourists, and help tell the story of the Siloam Springs community. The artist told local news KNWA that he hopes the mural reflects natural elements of the park and the variety of activities of its visitors: “I wanted to bring about an image that could encapsulate all seasons, but also encapsulate all the things that would be happening here: the summer picnics, the music, the war memorial that you have over here, so there’s a lot of emotions,” Fields said.

On his Instagram page, the artist explained, “The Mural concept utilizes the made & Natural landscape, park architecture, trees and river ecosystem that cuts through the historic park—bringing back what has been taken out in the parks progression . . . the inclusion of symbolism pertains to Arkansas Indigenous history. . . the Mural will be a first of its kind for Siloam Springs, creating a new vibrancy to help inspire and add the blossoming Arts of Northwest Arkansas.” In a video created by the city, below, Fields says of the mural, “It’ll do a lot that we can’t really foresee right now, but for the future, for kids that are playing in the park and see a mural—see art—it’s going to do a lot of things.”