

BYRD STREET

June 30, 2022

Last week I wrote about the reception celebrating the new mural on the back of **The Arts Center in Orange**. Now the Arts Center's community mural project has moved to the wall of **Atlantic Union Bank** facing **Taylor Park**. The wall currently



Hilary HOLLADAY

features a lovely but deteriorating painting of bank patrons and a bank teller from the early part of the 20th century and a man walking with two children—a self-portrait of the artist, **Todd Brown**, and his daughters. Brown grew up in Orange

and completed the sepia-toned mural in 1999.

With grant funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Arts Center invited artists earlier this year to apply to paint murals at the Arts Center, the bank and **Salvagewrights**. Of the three, the bank building is the only one that already had a mural on display.

When Arts Center Executive Director **Anna Pillow** announced the three winners of the competition, she stressed that their designs would be subject to community input before being finalized. Little did Pillow or Arts Center President **Ed Harvey** suspect that some of the community input would take the form of angry social media posts. There were comments that seemed to deliberately misread a project intended to add a splash of color to the town (it is Orange, after all) and make it more welcoming to tourists and residents alike.

On Saturday morning, the Arts Center hosted a community meet-and-greet at Taylor Park for **Juan Pineda**, a painter based in Bowie, Md., who has been selected to create the design for the park mural. Pineda's bold, abstract work is on display at the Bethesda, Md., metro center and Howard University, among other places. He will receive a stipend of \$2,000 for his painting in Orange, plus \$1,500 for supplies and free lodging in Orange while he works here, for up to a month.

During his opening remarks to an audience of about 100, Harvey announced that people should write their suggestions for the mural on comment slips and place them in a fishbowl on the refreshment table. For anyone who has followed the heated online discus-



PHOTOS BY HILARY HOLLADAY

Mural artist Juan Pineda

sion, it was obvious Harvey wanted to keep things calm while still giving everyone a chance to express an opinion.

In my conversations with various people in the crowd, I encountered a diversity of views. **Julia Lyman** of Orange is among those strongly in favor of Pineda's preliminary design, which combines abstract elements with a large cardinal and dogwood branches. "It's a wonderful solution intended to make as many people happy as possible. Public art should make people happy," she said while the park fountain bubbled in the background.

In a similar vein, **Adam Belmar**, who lives not far from Orange in Madison County, said, "It's exciting to think about a new mural that is iconic to this town. I think [Pineda] will do a good job, and I'm confident [he and the Arts Center] are going to do something very beautiful here and make this park even more special."

Valerie Smith, a bluegrass contemporary artist who moved to Somerset in December, represents a middle path: "I see the beauty of the original artist, but I understand [the mural] does need brightening up, and the town needs to move forward into the future. The Arts Center is trying to do something positive for the community." But before the mural is finalized, she would like the artist to reflect on the history of Orange and consider the possibility that the images of the cardinal and the dogwood branches "won't tell people anything about this town."

Orange resident **Carter Jacobs** is

design he presented on Saturday: "In all fairness, the new version is better." She prefers the revised version's softer background colors to the bright ones in the original.

Murray has thought about the murals a great deal. Having talked to Brown on Friday, she told me that she recommends restoring his mural and painting Pineda's design on the opposite side of the bank, on the wall facing an alley.

When I ran the restoration idea by Pillow, she said artists could've proposed that as their mural project, but no one did so.

Pineda, 45, was visiting Orange for the first time on Saturday. Smiling and upbeat, he said he would read all the comment forms and aim "for a meeting ground so people will be happy and satisfied." He's willing to "play around with the background and incorporate more natural elements," such as leaves and plants, but intends to stay true to



Lena Murray

among those who wish Brown's mural could stay. Jacobs has known Brown since the artist was a boy playing on a Little League team that Jacobs coached. "I don't see anything wrong with the mural on the bank. I watched it being painted by Todd Brown," Jacobs said. "I don't see why this painting has to be removed."

Lena Murray feels the same way. A couple of years ago, she and her husband, **John**, artists and owners of an art school, moved to Orange from the D.C. area. Lena told me that she and John love the character and charm of Orange, especially Taylor Park. Some weeks ago, she began criticizing the proposed mural designs on Facebook. It seems that Pineda's plans for the park bother her most of all.

But in a significant concession, she had this to say about the updated mural

his own ideas, because a successful mural needs to reflect "the expression, the emotion, that the artist has inside." ***

Postscript: Anna Pillow emailed me Monday with a final tally from Saturday's event. The Arts Center "received comment cards from **44** individuals praising the design or offering constructive feedback (as requested), while **16** individuals submitted written comments calling for Juan's mural/the whole project to be stopped." ***

Due to space limitations, I will save my thoughts on the dedication of the new park on Church Street and the Juneteenth celebration for a future edition. Until next time, Byrd watchers. ***

Send your tips and quips to me at hwholladay@gmail.com.



Valerie Smith



Carter Jacobs