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ICONIC ROANOKE MURAL GETS REFRESH

Jack Fralin of Best Bet Arts & Media begins repainting Dorothy Gillespie’s “Accentuated Forms in Space”

Roanoke, Va. — (April 24, 2023) — This week, fresh coats of paint are being applied to “[Accentuated Forms in Space](#),” the well loved but much faded work of public art on the side wall of downtown Roanoke’s 312 2nd Street, SW.

Painted in 1979 from a 1975 design done in pastel by renowned artist Dorothy Gillespie, the work has been called “fluid and playful.” The late Cabell Brand, President of Total Action for Progress (TAP), stated about the design, “Its colors harmonize just like people in a community should harmonize. It shows what beauty can be when everyone works together.” The mural was the result of collaboration between the artist and the region’s arts community to celebrate the Artemis Festival of Women in the Arts. Partners included *Artemis Journal*—which featured the work on its first cover—philanthropists Warner and Carol Dalhouse, and Ann Lee, who then owned the property.

For more than two decades, area residents and art lovers have called for a revival of the work, something that just recently became possible. “We were able to bring together good partners eager to make this work,” says Roanoke Arts Commission Chair Meighan Sharp. “Sometimes it just takes time for the stars — like Gillespie’s “Accentuated Forms in Space” — to align, and this year it came together quickly.”

2023 marks the 40th anniversary of the Roanoke Arts Commission, and the volunteer, 15-member body appointed by City Council voted in March to undertake the project in celebration of ‘forty years of progress, fun, and art.’ Sharp continues, “In many ways you can see Dorothy Gillespie’s gift to the city in the late Seventies as seeding the strong public

and community art program we have today, and appropriately in the *Year of the Artist*, we're celebrating this Roanoke daughter and arts legend."

2020 was the centennial of the artist's birth in Roanoke, and her son, Gary Israel, through the Dorothy M. Gillespie Foundation, has worked in communities across the county to showcase the joyful painting, sculpture, and activism to which the artist dedicated her life. "This mural is significant," says Israel. "It is one of only two murals of my mother's work produced in her lifetime, and it's the only one that remains. It's wonderful that it's here in the community so beloved to her."

The City of Roanoke has piloted a public-private partnership strategy that allows public funds to support public facing art on private property. "It's been allowed by our public art policies and plan for a while now," says Sharp, "but until we developed the "Art in Place" program, we didn't have the tools to encourage and shape these projects."

For the refurbishment of the mural, committed partners have collaborated and contributed financial resources. Those include Downtown Roanoke, Inc. (DRI), property owner Quintessence Properties, led by Peter "Reyn" Holden, and the Dorothy M. Gillespie Foundation.

Because the work is on private property and can only be accessed through the property of another owner, willing collaboration is critical to the effort. Metropolis / Premiere Parking, a private parking company operating 27 lots around downtown Roanoke, allowed Downtown Roanoke, Inc. to lease spaces, working with their customers and property owners to ensure access.

Holden's desire contribute to a more vibrant Downtown Roanoke was key. Quintessence Properties acquired the building, called "One City Plaza" in June 2022. "When the Arts Commission reached out," says Holden, "I knew that a project like this fit the role we want the building to play in advancing the economy. We want to provide a quality place to visit, to live, and to build a business."

That's a mission shared by Downtown Roanoke, Inc. (DRI). "The mural is a beautiful, artistic icon downtown and an important early contribution to downtown art," says DRI President and CEO Tina Workman. "We love any opportunity to bring more art to our downtown community and knew we needed to be involved in restoring this treasured work by Ms. Gillespie."

The mural will be painted by Jack Fralin of Best Bet Arts and Media. He has talked with the City several times over the years about repainting the mural. His previous work downtown includes refurbishment of the historic Coca-Cola advertisement on the side of 115 Salem Avenue, SE. "I've seen communities up and down the East Coast get excited about ghost murals, historic signage, and what they say—not just about the past but about the community today, and in the future," says Fralin.

"I spent a lot of time researching Ms. Gillespie's color palette," says Fralin. "We think of the colors as pastel and muted. But they weren't. They were a vibrant look toward the future

and while we're replicating the past with this mural, we're also looking ahead. We're always looking ahead, and I think that's a fitting posture for Roanoke."

Look up as you pass Church Avenue and 2nd Street in the coming week to monitor progress and see "Accentuated Forms in Space" forming once again.

Work is expected to take between 7 and 14 days. Watch for images of progress on Facebook and Instagram @artinroanoke.

About Dorothy Gillespie

Twentieth century American Artist Dorothy Gillespie (1920-2012) is well known for her abstract expressionism, decorative abstraction, site-specific installations, advocacy in the women's movement and art in public spaces. She was a pioneer in the new directions of metal sculpture and best known for large-scale, highly colorful painted arrangements of cut aluminum strips radiating, undulating, or curling in giant arrangements of ribbon, enchanted towers, and even the burst of fireworks piece. Well known as a painter, sculptor and installation artist, her work incorporated many significant 20th-century trends in art.

The painter and sculptor was born in Roanoke, Virginia, in 1920. She enjoyed an artistic career that spanned over 70 years before her death at 92 in 2012. She studied at the Maryland Institute College of Art, MD, then moved to New York City in 1943 where she studied art at the Art Students League of New York and Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17.

See other works by the artist at Center in the Square, Jefferson Center, and the Melrose and Williamson Road branches of Roanoke Public Libraries. Learn more about Dorothy Gillespie at www.dorothygillespie.com. Learn more about "Accentuated Forms in Space" at the [Public Art Archive](#).

About Best Bet Arts & Media

Owned by artist Jack Fralin, Best Bet has been active in the restoration of historic murals in communities across the country. Specializing in hand lettering historic signs and murals, Fralin trained at Virginia Commonwealth University. A musician, he collects and works on guitars and is a Roanoke native.

About Quintessence Properties

Owner of One City Plaza at 312 2nd Street since June 2022, Quintessence Properties is led by Peter "Reyn" Holden. Holden lives with his family in Richmond, Virginia, but has ties to the region as a graduate of Roanoke College, where he studied Business Administration and Economics. He received an MBA from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business.

About Downtown Roanoke, Inc.

Downtown Roanoke, Inc. (DRI) works to make Downtown Roanoke the preferred place to work, live and play by partnering with businesses, property owners, government agencies, civic and cultural organizations, and the community. With these partners, DRI shapes strategies, guides public policy and implements programs to strengthen the economic vitality of downtown. This year, the organization launched the successful Downtown Ambassadors Program, providing regular and reliable services to visitors, businesses, and residents and making downtown an even better place to be with every action.

About the Roanoke Arts Commission

The Roanoke Arts Commission (RAC) was established in 1983 to “advise and assist City Council on matters relating to the advancement of the arts and humanities within the city.” Fifteen volunteers appointed by council work to increase the collective impact of arts and culture in the community by

- guiding City investments in arts and culture,
- advancing the City’s Arts and Cultural Plan,
- developing and Implementing the City’s Public Art Plan, and
- advocating for arts and cultural initiatives and investment.

This year, the Roanoke Arts Commission is celebrating its 40th year of progress, art, and fun. Learn more about the Roanoke Arts at www.roanokearts.org.

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