

UW-Stout: Street art and graffiti course students to paint mural on Applied Arts Building

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Menomonie, Wis. – A new mural will soon adorn an exterior wall of University of Wisconsin-Stout’s Applied Arts Building, telling the story of art through the ages, from the cave paintings of horses in France and Spain to music, photography, pottery and more, representing the different majors in the [School of Art and Design](#).

The nearly 400-square-foot mural – 40 feet long and about 10 feet high – was designed by four UW-Stout students and will be painted in late May and unveiled Thursday, June 2, by students during a new Graffiti and Street Art course.

The idea to bring street art to UW-Stout came to Professor Cynthia Bland, [art and art history department](#) chair, on her walks through Edinburgh and Glasgow, Scotland, where she taught in the summer of 2019.

“I would take my students on a street art walking tour, and I just fell in love with the murals around the cities,” said Bland, who has been at the university for 17 years. “I thought with murals, we could put Menomonie and UW-Stout on the map. We could get people excited about more artwork around town. Art impacts peoples’ lives in a positive way; it can add beauty and culture to our living spaces or challenge us to think deeper about social issues.”

A campus community effort

Dave Beck, interim associate provost for Partner and Student Engagement and former director of the SOAD, taught in Scotland and is familiar with the street art there. Beck and Bland discussed the potential of a mural on campus for several years. Last spring, he introduced her to alum Wade Lambrigtsen, owner and proprietor of [Vintage Sign Shop](#) in Menomonie.

Lambrigtsen specializes in signs and murals and has been running Vintage Sign Shop for 20 years, having started his business from scratch in his basement after working for a marketing firm out of college. He graduated in 2000 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design.

“I wanted to get up from the desk and make things with my hands,” he said.

Lambrigtsen’s artwork can be seen across the nation from privately owned buildings off of the Purdue, Michigan State and Portland campuses, to signs within UW-Stout’s Memorial Student Center. His work also can be seen in historic downtown Menomonie, including the recently redesigned Silver Dollar Saloon signage and Harry Miller motorcycle mural on the Keane building as part of Paint the Town, a mural event in spring 2021.

Lambrigtsen is a member of [the Walldogs](#), an international group of sign artists, illustrators and muralists who meet once a year over a five-day period to voluntarily paint 15 to 20 commissioned murals in a predetermined town. The murals depict local history with preapproved subject matter.

With her passion for street art and UW-Stout in mind, Bland approached Chancellor Katherine Frank with the idea of creating a street art course and placing a mural on campus. Frank was enthusiastic about the possibility of a mural on campus and put Bland in contact with Royce Smith, dean of Arts and Architecture at Montana State University. Smith has spearheaded several mural projects at MSU and provided advice for initiating the project at UW-Stout, Bland said.

First, a potential location of the mural needed to be chosen. Provost Glendali Rodriguez suggested the loading docks of Applied Arts, and Bland agreed that it would be an ideal spot to highlight student talent.

“I thought the Applied Arts Building needed to show more of who we are on the outside, to reflect our vibrant community of artists and designers on the inside,” Bland said. “The mural is a visible chance for students to create a message of what they want to say about themselves and to leave their mark on campus.”

“The mural will be something permanent that’s part of the school. It’s wonderful – something the students can be proud of,” Lambrigtsen added.

The initial proposal was developed in April 2021, when Director of Facilities Management Justin Utpadel wrote the Memorandum of Understanding, a proposal of the project and an agreement between the SOAD and campus for the upkeep of the mural. Utpadel also coordinated communication with the Campus Exterior Development Committee for approval of the location.

Within the MOU, street art is defined as “art that’s placed in public places with the property owner’s permission. Street art murals are elaborate wall paintings that are created in the presence of the watchful eye of the community.”

A mural designed by students, painted by students

At the start of the spring semester, Bland and Lambrigtsen sent out a request for proposals, inviting the more than 900 SOAD students to submit their mural designs.

“We set guidelines for designers to follow, with specs of the space and the problem of how to work around two trees that are adjacent to the wall,” Lambrigtsen explained. “They were given a list of colors, and they were to choose six colors to include in their palette. They also knew which brushes would be used, giving the designers an idea of the tools the painters would have access to in terms of width of the brushes and the amount of detail they’d be able to incorporate.”

Two professors, Erik Evensen and Tim Tozer, created an assignment for their students to design murals for the space.

In the Digital Illustration course, Evensen usually assigns students to choose a regional location and develop concepts of it as a first project. “When Cynthia presented to the SOAD faculty about the mural project, I thought it fit nicely with my opening project and made it an easy addition to the semester,” he said.

His students worked in teams of four. Bland and Lambrigtsen were involved in critiquing the designs, visiting the studios throughout the process. On March 24, Frank and Rodriguez approved the final design.

“Chancellor Frank and Provost Rodriguez were instrumental in supporting this project and providing guidance along the way, and we are appreciative of their willingness to feature student designers from SOAD,” Bland said.

The final design was created by Digital Illustration students Jack Gilbert, a senior in graphic design and interactive media, Minneapolis; Bree Marconnet, a senior in studio art, Waterloo; Amelia Moschkau, a sophomore in game design and development, New Auburn; and Tommy Slane, a senior in graphic design and interactive media, Minneapolis.

“From the first day of the semester, Amelia, Bree, Jack and Tommy showed a strong collaborative spirit,” Evensen said. “Not only did they generate strong ideas early on, but their willingness to revise, adapt and integrate class feedback helped them define a collective creative direction, which is why this project is as powerful as it is.”

Marconnet was relieved when Evensen introduced the mural as an assignment. “I have a busy schedule with three studios and two other courses. I wouldn’t have had the opportunity outside of class to dedicate the time it takes to make a design I’m proud of,” they said.

The team’s creative process began with sketches by Marconnet and Gilbert of people doing BFA-related activities. “Mine were proportional to life, acting out studio art and theater, whereas Jack’s sketches were tiny people (nicknamed ‘homunculi’ by Erik) crawling on a game controller and a phone,” Marconnet explained. “From there, all four of us sketched more ideas with people of varying scale representing art majors. We went through several compositional drafts, rearranging objects a few times, whipping up final vector art and then rearranging the composition several more times in Adobe Illustrator.”

Moschkau chose the six colors the team used from the given list. “I went through many different color palettes and used Photoshop to see how it would look on the wall,” she said. “The blues are tints and shades of Stout’s blue, and the deep orange was chosen to highlight how bright the nearby bricks get at sunset.”

“With the final draft of all of our sketches put together, all the assets had a more uniform style to them,” Gilbert added. “Overall, I think all of us worked extremely well together. I was really glad I got to work with this group, and I’m extremely excited for it to get painted this summer.”

Slane agreed. “Everything fell into place naturally because we were all able to work toward our strengths,” he said. “I am very excited to see this project permanently installed on campus because most of the work I do does not leave my screen, and I’m proud to be a part of representing all of the amazing work that comes out of Stout.”

Bland loves the cleverness of their design. “We wanted an all-over busy design, using all available space, with each panel activated by interesting features. This was an applied learning lesson of how muralists approach the problem of painting a 40-foot wall, looking at the differences between the design on paper or the computer, versus actually painting it.

“In future iterations of this project, we’d like to get more designs from general SOAD students,” she added. “We are definitely keeping submitted designs for potential future use. The finalists were all strong contenders, and it wasn’t an easy decision.”

Graffiti and Street Art course open to all students

After a year of discussions and planning by the Campus Art Committee and the Campus Exterior Committee, the Graffiti and Street Art course was approved and begins Monday, May 16. The three-week, general education summer course will be co-led by Bland and Lambrigtsen, who has joined the SOAD faculty. Students can

register through [Access Stout](#). Registration is open for 15 to 22 students.

Students will need 10 days to paint the final design before the public unveiling on June 2. They will learn how to prepare the wall for painting, make projections of the design, paint the wall and protect it against the elements for upkeep for decades.

They will learn the history and differences between graffiti and street art; one being unsolicited and often considered as vandalism, the other being commissioned as public artwork or with the property owner's consent.

"Any student can take part in the course, even if they've never picked up a paintbrush before," Lambrigtsen said. "Anybody can paint a mural if they have the steps. Students will have the knowledge to go back to their hometowns and know the process for producing a mural – something they can do as a profession."

Marconnet was already interested in joining the summer course to help paint, and "now I'm really planning on making it happen," they said.

SOAD has six Bachelor of Fine Arts programs, each with unique skillsets, including [animation and digital media](#), [game design and development](#), [graphic design and interactive media](#), [industrial design](#), [interior design](#) and [studio art](#). It offers two Bachelor of Science degrees in [arts administration and entrepreneurship](#) and [video production](#) and a [Master of Fine Arts in design](#).

UW-Stout is [Wisconsin's Polytechnic University](#), with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes.