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Three artists chosen as finalists for Bristol Port Marker memorial



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Left to right: Spencer Evans with his sculpture "Pride of the East Side," the centerpiece of G.W. Jackson Legacy Park in Corsicana, Texas. (photo courtesy of Kyle Hobratschk); Deborah Spears Moorehead; and Deborah Baronas and Greg Spiess at Fallingwater.

Posted Wednesday, November 22, 2023 3:30 pm

By Christy Nadalin

Art jurors for the Bristol Middle Passage Port Marker Project have selected three finalists, all Rhode Island artists, to present their designs for the memorial that will acknowledge the history of Bristol's participation in the transatlantic human trade and its effects on African and Indigenous peoples.

The memorial will be erected at Independence Park, just north of the flagpoles. Each artist will create a model which will be on display at Rogers Free Library for the month of December. The public will have the opportunity to weigh in on the final choice, as the Project committee has strived for transparency throughout this process.

Here's a snapshot of each of the artists vying to create the memorial.

Spencer Evans

Providence-based artist Spencer Evans is a figurative draftsman, painter and sculptor who aims to tell detailed stories by using the imagery of specific moments. His choice of clothing and dramatic poses and facial expressions in the work is used to reference shared experiences rooted in identity and culture within the Black American community.

He sees Black expression as a heroic form of communication from one generation to the next — it has existed despite direct violent opposition since his ancestors were brought to American shores. "My work is free for any and everyone to witness and enjoy our songs of joy and pain; however, I am speaking to those who know," he wrote in a statement. "The descendants of the unfadeable."

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Evans is a three-time Webby Award winner, two-time Cannes Lion award winner, two-time Design & Art Direction winner, two-time ADC Gold Award Winner, and a Campaign Media "Power of Purpose" Gold Award winner. Evans is also an Assistant Professor of Drawing at the Rhode Island School of Design and serves as Programs Head of the Experimental Foundations Studies Division.

"I am infinitely inspired by the wondrous attributes of my people — from the brilliantly powerful resilience and creativity of my ancestors to the unfathomable giftedness of our youth," Evans wrote. "My love and respect for our cyclically triumphant existence guides me through my creative expression of our stories. My artistic practice is a series of attempts at telling those stories with every ounce of vibrating flare whether its electricity is above or beneath the surface — and I request the help of my ancestors in every attempt at getting it right. This is my direction with this project and every other story I am tasked with telling."

Deborah Spears Moorehead

Spears Moorehead wears a lot of hats: internationally known fine artist, sculptor, author, historian, entrepreneur, Native American consultant, storyteller, composer, and performer. A member of the Seaconke Pokanoket Wampanoag Tribal Nation of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, she is a direct descendant of Massasoit.

In 2021 Spears Moorehead was invited to be the Artist in Residency at Brown University where she created a four panel mural addressing colonial and contemporary issues of racism.

Her art is on exhibit throughout 2023 at The Mashantucket Pequot Museum gallery; she is one of Bunker Hill Community College's Distinguished Scholar and Artist in Residency for 2023; and she recently finished two embellished original murals that will be on permanent display in the entrance of the Quinnipiac Valley Museum in Guilford, Connecticut.

To name just a few of her projects and honors, in 2019, Spears Moorehead painted two murals in Providence, Rhode Island. The first one is a 16 foot "Land Acknowledgement Mural" on Cypress Street. The second one is the "The Providence River Mural" funded by a Sites and Stories Grant from the Providence Preservation Society. The Providence River Mural was displayed at Providence City Hall in January 2021. She was awarded a 2019 Master/Apprentice Grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, and a "Princess Redwing Arts Award by The Tomaquaug Museum in 2020.

Also in 2020 she collaborated with artist Alison Newsome on a sculptural piece for the Art, Culture and Tourism Department of the City of Providence's PVD fest called "The Three Sisters."

This fall Deborah will be exhibiting her work at the Mystic Seaport Museum. In 2021, Deborah completed two community and historic murals for non profits: one in Wakefield for the Collective Museum and another for The Nolumbeka Project of Turner Falls, Mass.

Deborah Baronas and Greg Spiess

This husband and wife team have worked together on a multitude of projects. "We bring both artistic and architectural skill sets to these efforts," they said in a statement.

Their first commission together was the design for ticket centers and graphics for venues for the Los Angeles Olympics. Locally they recently designed seven sculptural installations at the new Rhode Island Veterans Home in Bristol.

Deborah studied textile design and painting at the Rhode Island School of Design. After working in New York City, Los Angeles and Europe as a Creative Director in the textile industry, she moved back to Rhode Island and began work as a design consultant and fine artist.

Based on her own work experience and family heritage, she explores the condition of the American worker and landscape, Baronas designs site-specific installations that produce interactive environments incorporating painting, translucent panels in glass and textiles, music and video. Her work is based on personal interviews, portraits of her subjects and archival materials.

Greg is an architect working in the East Bay with a variety of experiences on the East and West coasts as well as assignments in the Middle East and the Pacific. A former adjunct

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faculty at the Roger Williams University School of Architecture and University of Southern California, where he graduated, he has always had an interest in world affairs, public spaces and has done post-graduate studies in Urban Planning and enjoys site planning and innovative strategies in environmental design.

He is currently working with JHLTecture in Bristol on a variety of projects including the Unity Park renovations, the downtown outdoor dining plans, Rogers Free Library and historical adaptive reuse projects in Bristol and many other sites throughout New England.

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MEET OUR STAFF

Jim McGaw

A lifelong Portsmouth resident, Jim graduated from Portsmouth High School in 1982 and earned a journalism degree from the University of Rhode Island in 1986. He's worked two different stints at East Bay Newspapers, for a total of 18 years with the company so far. When not running all over town bringing you the news from Portsmouth, Jim listens to lots and lots and lots of music, watches obscure silent films from the '20s and usually has three books going at once. He also loves to cook crazy New Orleans dishes for his wife of 25 years, Michelle, and their two sons, Jake and Max.

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