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Hunger Coalition Building Blooms with Art

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAREN BOSSICK

Hadi Cuadros danced up to the north-facing wall on the Bloom Community Food Center in Bellevue and turned back towards her mother Migdaelma Caudros and brother John.

"My face is a big face!" she exclaimed.

Indeed, Spanish-born artist Rafael Blanco had painted a 20-foot-tall likeness of little Hadi's face in shades of purple and tan on the side of the building, along with that of two other volunteers for The Hunger Coalition.

His 20-foot-by-21-foot mural and others painted over a three-day span this past week are designed to evoke thoughts of growth, connectivity and community.

They range from Amanda Lynn's giant depictions of corn, peaches, butterflies, bees and hummingbirds splashed on a rainbow of colors ranging from yellow and red to blue and green in the new Community Café to artist Arcy's depiction of a child watering a plant on the back side of the building.

The Hunger Coalition threw an open house complete with free Mexican burritos from La Cabinata and free basil and other plants from its new greenhouses as it invited the community to watch the artists at work.

"Volunteers have been cooking curries all day in the new community kitchen. And we have artists at work. It's like the pandemic is beginning to lift," said The Hunger Coalition's spokesperson Kristin McMahon.

The hot sun drilled its way into Blanco's back as temperatures climbed into the lower 80s. But it didn't faze the artist, who had moved to the United States to attend school and now lives in Chicago.

"I'm from the south of Spain so this is not much for me," said the 39-year-old artist. "I have painted in snow in Denver, in rain elsewhere... I don't think about it because I'm doing what I love. If I was not painting, I would be suffering more."

Blanco said he originally wanted to become a professional tennis player but got an MFA in Fine Arts at the University of Nevada-Reno after he found his passion turning to art. He started out a fine arts studio painter specializing in paintings where he could control the lighting and other effects. But he painted his first mural and found that he loved the rapport with those watching him at work.

"As a studio artist, you're not connecting with the people who look at your art. But you get to talk with the people who see your art when you're painting murals," he said.

Blanco said he hoped his profiles would serve as an inspiration: "This is a community for the people about the people. The Hunger Coalition has a great impact in the community. It influences positivity. It's about beautifying, improving the community."

Inside, Chris Fonseca of Nampa painted a mural across two walls of a children's room that depicted children planting clouds in the sky. The mural, he said, is representative of planting a dream.

"I'm really behind what they do here," said Fonseca. "I know that you can't plant dreams, but I try to do stuff that doesn't happen in reality. And kids are the original dreamers."

Andrei Krautsou, a Belarusian artist who studied architecture in Minsk and now lives in New York, climbed onto a mechanical hoist to paint the Aztec sun and goddess of the harvest on the center's front wall facing the new greenhouses.

Not only does the scale of the canvas--painting on walls--allow him to think big, said the man behind the husband-wife team Key Detail, but it's an awesome way to inspire people.

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Deborah Knapp, who spent a couple days watching the artists at work, said the work displayed the abundance of possibilities in the community.

"It's interesting to see how they work, too," she added. The artist painting the Aztec art sketched the whole thing in detail before beginning to paint it. But Chris Fonseca took a brush and began painting away without a single sketch. I think all of the art is a great addition that really shows off the mission of the garden."



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