

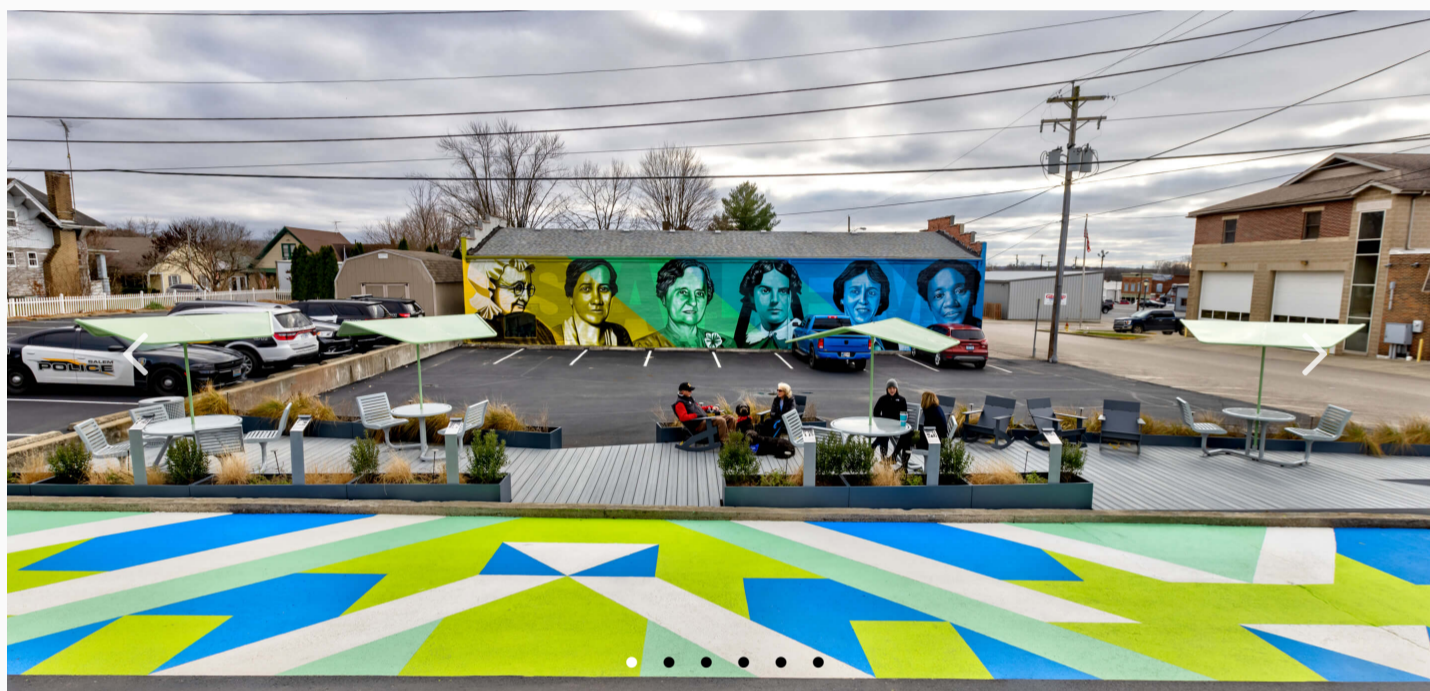


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Activating Asphalt

LAA Office brings "barn quilt urbanism" to downtown Salem, Indiana, with new Heritage Park

By [Matt Hickman](#) • January 5, 2022 • [Landscape Architecture](#), [Midwest](#), [Unveiled](#), [Urbanism](#)



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LAA Office, a Columbus, Indiana-based multidisciplinary design studio co-founded by Daniel Luis Martinez and Lulu Loquidis, has shared details of its newly completed [Heritage Park](#), a local landmark-linking pocket park that brings an exuberant pop of color and new public use to an otherwise unexceptional expanse of asphalt in downtown Salem, Indiana. (For those unfamiliar with the geography of the Hoosier State, agriculture-dependent Salem is roughly an hour south of the much larger city of Columbus and serves as the seat of Washington County.)



The 1,000-square-foot space features 4,500 square feet of public art while fusing together two Salem landmarks: A picturesque town square dominated by a stately 1886 county courthouse building, and to the east, the five-acre campus of the [John Hay Center](#), which features a historical museum and period structures owned and operated by the Washington Country Historical Society. (The Salem Downton Historic District and many of its buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.)



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(Travis Perry)

Major elements of the petite linear park include a site-connecting asphalt mural-slash-pedestrian path rendered in bright blue and yellow hues and a parking spot-replacing elevated deck with plenty of seating alongside greenery-filled planters. The seats, tables, and planters are by [Anova Furnishings](#) while the park's rockers are by [Loll Designs](#). The composite decking was provided by [Trex](#).

In a press release provided by LAA Office, Loquidis elaborated that a casual, accessible outdoor space for social rendezvous was a top demand from Salem residents. "We worked with the stakeholders to select fun, contemporary furnishings that would make the park a popular gathering space," she said. "One of the biggest comments from stakeholders on our team was Salem's lack of public seating and places where folks might meet a friend for lunch or a coffee outdoors. We wanted to provide that for them within the context of new public artworks."



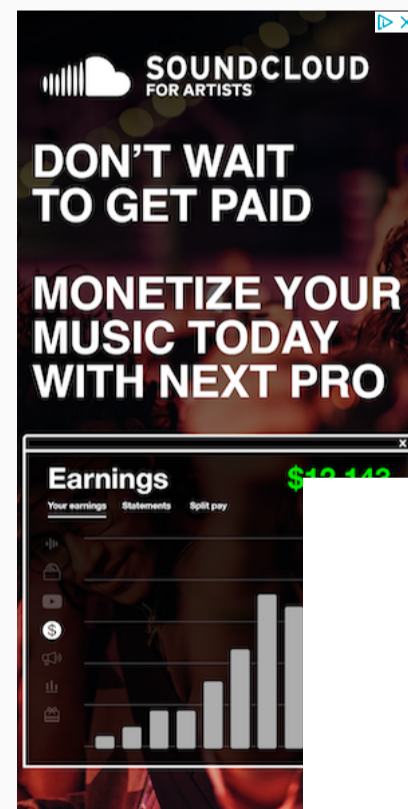
On that note, the newly realized space is framed by a large-scale mural by Spanish-born, Chicago-based artist and educator [Rafel Blanco](#) on the wall of the adjacent AB Salon building. It depicts six trailblazing women with ties to Washington County: Sarah Parke Morrison, the first female graduate of Indiana University and later the school's first female faculty member; Emma Christy Baker, the first Black female police officer in the Indianapolis Police Department; Lula "Desse" Rudder, the first licensed female pharmacist in Indiana; Terry Hall, a famed N.C.A.A. women's basketball coach; Dr. "Granny" Mary Reid Lusk, a medical practitioner and abolitionist involved in the region's Underground Railroad operations, and Bradie Shrum, a beloved longtime educator and namesake of a local elementary school.

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(Tony Vasquez)

As detailed by LAA Office, the design of Heritage Park “encourages pedestrians to discover new parts of the city and to learn about pioneering women from Salem” and is an example of what the studio refers to as “barn quilt urbanism” in that it “stitches” together an existing landscape (in this case, a colorless asphalt parking lot) into an outdoor museum or art trail. The young studio’s recently completed [6th Street Arts Alley](#) project in Columbus took a similar public art- and placemaking-focused approach.



“Conceptually, we imagined the project as a way of creating a linear stitch in the town’s urban fabric,” explained Martinez in a statement. “We were influenced by the regional folk art tradition of barn quilting. Barn quilts are a rural phenomenon produced by the stewards of the land upon which they appear. We wanted to adopt the aesthetic language and organizational framework of barn quilts in an urban setting because we knew it would resonate with the citizens of Salem.”



(Travis Perry)

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together. Using this framework, we also realized that the stitch itself has the capacity to become a pathway or trajectory, since it constitutes a new physical element within the urban fabric."

The concept for Heritage Park emanated from the [Center for Rural Engagement](#) at Indiana University Bloomington as well as the university's [ServeDesign Center](#), which funded the initial park study. (Martinez is also a faculty associate at the Center for Rural Engagement as well as an assistant professor at Indiana University's J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program.) Implementation funding was provided in part by a significant grant from [Regional Opportunity Initiatives](#). Columbus-based Tovey-Perry Co. served as the project contractor.



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