PERFORMING ARTS DECEMBER 2, 2015

First Friday: Crossroads billboards are where the arts and business meet

HIGHLIGHTS

Through the Charlotte Street Foundation, the spaces above Missouri Bank have been offered to local artists

The foundation and bank receive about 75 to 100 applications a year

The winners are displayed for three months

BY ANNE KNIGGENDORF
Special to Ink

When a branch of Missouri Bank and Trust moved to 125 Southwest Blvd. in the Crossroads Arts District in 2008, architects working on the remodel discovered that two double-sided billboards were providing structural support for the building.

Bank board members had wanted to eliminate the 22-by-10-foot billboards. Not possible.

The logic of what happened next seemed to go like this: If the billboards support the bank, and the bank is in the heart of Kansas City's arts district, the bank should support the arts district. The two institutions, arts and finance, could develop a relationship built on a shared structural integrity.

The bank approached the Charlotte Street Foundation about offering the board space to local artists. Since then, the foundation and bank have accepted between 75 and 100 applications a year from local artists vying to display their work for a three-month stint.

"They're big supporters of the creative community. ... It's like putting their priorities out front," artist Grant Miller, a past participant, says of the bank. "That support is part of their ethos."

Phil "Sike" Shafer and DeAnna Skedel will share the spotlight beginning Friday.

"It's a handshake. The rest of it's really abstract," Shafer says, explaining "Agreed," his new piece. "The idea was that street art, art from the streets, meets the fine arts world."

He said his boards are about the meeting not only of the district's varied styles of art, but about the agreement that artists and businesses will work together.

Shafer, a graphic designer at the University of Kansas Medical Center , is also known for his "Angry Zebra," a 50-foot-high mural on the Bonfils building at 12th Street and Grand Boulevard. Its prominent location has scored it appearances in KU Med Center promo videos, and more recently, in a viral time-lapsed video of the Royals parade.

Skedel, an art instructor at Metropolitan Community College-Blue River in Independence, will show her piece "Dino Fear" across the other two boards. She used her 8-year-old daughter Isadora's drawings, which she routinely finds around the house and sees as pieces

of communication.

Skedel wrote about her daughter's work in her state eet: "The drawings address her fears, thoughts, wishes, and d n, doled out in tiny increments, most often left scattered around th s are little glimpses of what passes through her. I hope by putting them together, pausing with them, I may begin to know something of who she is. I might have something to hold on to."

And where some artists sketch, Skedel says she "collages." So the images on her artboard include her husband Victor, a sky view from Interstate 70 one morning, and her daughter's drawings, all Photoshopped into one image.

Skedel recognizes that the boards — like childhood — are temporary. She aims to use them to communicate about seeing and remembering that which doesn't last. It's also about noticing what's around her, discovering what makes her happy and celebrating the joy of living surrounded by creativity — the boards give drivers-by a taste of this.

Whatever the artist's intention, the artboards are a three-month gift to the city and the arts community. Each change invites viewers to ask what the billboard is suggesting and to play the part of an active observer of their surroundings. .

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