

Melmira: DKH Draws

[Melissa and Daniel Katz-Hernandez appear on screen in front of a mural painting of three Black boys playing, laughing, and throwing water balloons at each other.]

Melissa: Everything looks so beautiful!

Daniel: Thank you!

M: When did you spray paint this?

D: What I just did now was just some touching up. The first time I really started it all was in 2020.

M: How long did it take you to finish all this?

D: Like around two weeks, maybe 14 or 15 days, including some rainy days where I had to stop, and then continue painting when it let up.

M: Cool, cool. I've seen many people take pictures with this in the back. I thought about you being here, so I wanted to take this chance to chat with you in front of all this. I know you're an artist, right?

D: Right, yes.

M: How long have you been an artist?

D: I've been an artist ever since I was a baby, that's what my mother tells everyone. But I started noticing my skills developing after I graduated from Gallaudet. I'm a 2014 Gallaudet alumnus. After graduation, I went to work as a videographer, and I used the subways a lot. I figured I could kill time by drawing, and then I started picking up more and more skills, and did more vee-veeing. Then I started participating in art shows, with groups of hearing people. I met many people, some of them mural artists. They explained their experiences, and I started to get immersed into the art world. The rest is history, that.

M: So now you've turned to a different career in art. What is your style like? If someone asked you what your style was, how would you answer that question?

D: Well. Honestly, that word, “style,” is something that easily changes over time. Like how I learn and develop different kinds of skills and such. Lately, everyone’s noticed that, yeah, I usually do something between realism and cartoon-ish, a style that relates a lot to younger people. I enjoy doing art and getting different reactions from different people. That, I really enjoy that. A good experience.

M: Is this your first mural?

D: Nope, it’s not the first mural. It’s my, hmm, third. Third, yeah.

M: Wow. So where are the first two?

D: The second is in Streetcar 82, in the bathroom.

M: Oh, yes! The one with the hands and DC, that was your work? I didn’t realize that.

M: So, the first?

D: The first is in a coffee shop. I had a good friend who happened to need someone to paint. I painted three panels on a wall. It’s full of people who frequent that coffee shop. I painted based on pictures of these people, all over the wall. It was 52 faces in total. So that was a good experience, yeah.

M: Now, I want to know more about THIS mural. What was your inspiration for this?

D: Really, the inspiration for this is from the BLM movement in 2020. That experience, seeing all the news, articles, and everything, it was all such a profound experience for me, to the point where I realized that, yes, I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to counter the negativity in posts about BLM, and for the Black youth, the boys. I wanted to help with that, so it was my vision for this. So I wrote a proposal to this city, and I was surprised that many liked the idea. So I just went ahead and put this up here. Really, the point is to imagine that you’re not kneeling or ducking around bullets in fear, but in joy and carefreeness, and to have good times and not worry about anything. That, really, it’s a good experience for the youth.

M: I just want to move away and look back at this mural, with you, from that perspective.

M: So, looking at all this, after you’ve explained the reasoning, yes, I see it now. These young Black boys are just having a good time playing.

D: Yes.

M: The underlying point is that this is what their lives are supposed to be like.

D: Right, exactly.

M: Without fear and such. Yeah. I'm curious, what was the community's response to this mural?

D: The reactions- many really loved it, and they told me that. There was a block party here, hosted after this mural was done, just a public gathering. Many had strong feelings, and took pride in it. They contacted me, and they were grateful, and then I thought it would quiet down from there. A few months later my phone vibrated and I pulled it out, and many were contacting me through this mural, with Instagram, and they said they loved it. That happened often, and it would always be right when I was just about to forget about this. It kept happening, like it's still impacting people daily. I really appreciate that.

M: And, I'm sure it was nice to show everyone that BIPOC deaf artists deserve more opportunities, really.

D: Yes, that's true. More visibility.

M: Yes, definitely. So what's next for you?

D: What's next is to keep up doing mural projects. One of my dreams, that I would love to do, is put murals in each deaf school. That would be nice, so it's my dream, yes. And also, I would love to collab with other deaf artists and share. I feel that, sure, I can finish many things on my own, but to get farther, that is better with a group.

M: Yes, that's true. I look forward to seeing that group collaboration happen!

D: Thank you.

[Melmira's logo appears on screen. Supported by DPAN.TV and Convo. Host/Anchor: Melissa Elmira Yingst. Edited by Alexandra Hickox. Captioned by aslcaptions.com. End of video.]