

August 25, 2023

To: Kynde Kiefel, Director of Donald H. Sheehan Gallery

From: Harmony Burright (2006) and Andrew Geniesse Elmore (2005)

Subject: Proposed "All the Rare Birds" art installation to honor and celebrate Whitman's diverse community and the memory of Kyle Martz (2007)

We have been working with a team of alumni, staff, and faculty from the Whitman community, as well as friends of Kyle Martz in Walla Walla and beyond to envision ways that his memory could be honored and celebrated on Whitman campus. After much conversation and deliberation, we are planning to commission a work of art titled "All the Rare Birds" from local artist and Whitman alumni, Daniel Forbes. Our hope is that we can partner with Whitman to find a home for this piece of art on the Whitman campus and have it be cared for as a part of Whitman's permanent art collection. We are in the early stages of trying to make this a reality and welcome your feedback and the opportunity to meet with you and discuss our hopes for this project. We bring this concept forward with open hearts and an eagerness to partner with you and others at Whitman. It is our understanding that any proposal will need to be brought before the Whitman Art Advisory Committee and we hope you can help us determine the right timing and best approach to do that. Please see the attached materials for more information about the proposed project, including project considerations, the sources of inspiration for the commissioned art, and additional information about the commissioned artist. We thank you for your time and look forward to connecting with you.

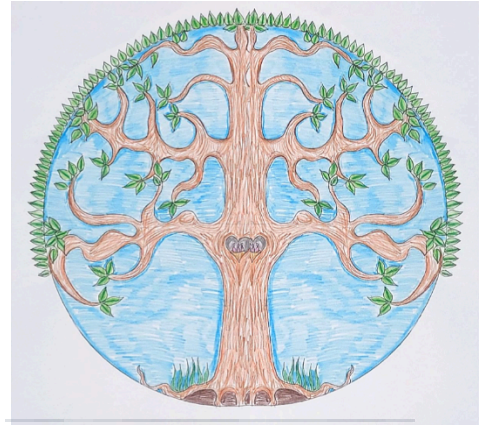
With gratitude,

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About the Project

We are commissioning a piece of art entitled “All the Rare Birds,” and asking for this to be added to Whitman College’s art collection. This piece of art will honor and celebrate the memory of Kyle Martz, a Whitman college alumni and beloved longtime staff member who served many diverse communities at Whitman and in Walla Walla before his life was taken from him in 2019. The art will also honor and celebrate the diversity of the Whitman community, those living and past, who show up as themselves and contribute to the vitality of Whitman College. The art will be commissioned by a local artist, Daniel Forbes, a Whitman College alumni who taught at Whitman and curated and cared for art on campus for many years.



The proposed artwork will be an 8ft x 8ft circular wall-hanging done in semi-low relief. This wooden, assemblage-based sculptural “mural” will be comprised of 4 quarters that fit together to create the circle. Each piece will use a “french cleat” mounting system for easy installation.

Once combined, the finished image is a mature tree with convoluted branches. Its brown limbs and green leaves are backlit by a bright, light blue background. On every limb of the tree sits a variety of whimsical birds. The tree, leaves, and birds are all constructed through repurposed wood assemblage and painted in vivid colors and intricate patterns.

Project Considerations

We will not ask Whitman to contribute any funds toward the creation/installation of “All the Rare Birds.” All fundraising for this project will be done independently. We also do not anticipate our efforts having any meaningful impact on the College’s own development activities.

Any funds raised beyond the cost to commission the art will be dedicated to the international student scholarship in Kyle’s name and other deserving organizations he supported.

Through this proposal we are asking the College to provide an appropriate space for the installation of this work once it is completed; for the piece to be added to Whitman’s permanent collection; and for a visible didactic acknowledging Kyle’s life and the artwork’s significance to accompany the final piece.

We understand the acceptance of the piece rests with the Art Advisory Committee and is contingent on the appearance of the finished artwork. We would like to work with the Sheehan Gallery and the Art Advisory Committee throughout this process to ensure it meets their standards, with the goal of “All the Rare Birds” being completed, installed, and a small dedication ceremony held in March 2024 (aligning with Kyle’s 40th birthday).

We hope you will give serious consideration toward this project. Kyle Martz deserves to be significantly celebrated. This work will stand in opposition to the terrible circumstances surrounding his departure from us and offer a healing moment to still-traumatized community members.

Additionally, given the onslaught of negative rhetoric and threats currently facing the LGBTQIA+ community and other marginalized groups, the burst of color and revelry and the acknowledgement of beautiful diverse lives in “All the Rare Birds” would be a particularly timely addition to the College’s creative holdings.

Inspiration: About Kyle

Kyle Martz was originally from Newport, Oregon. In 2002, he traveled to Germany as a high school Rotary Youth Exchange Student. The following year, he arrived at Whitman College to pursue his undergraduate degree. The Whitman community is comprised of remarkable people. Even so, Kyle's extraordinary personality and intellect were broadly recognized.

Kyle became a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. While a student, he received the David Nord award, which supports projects that address critical issues facing queer communities. In fall 2006, he received a Sally Ann Abshire Research Scholar Award to work with Gender Studies Professor Robert Tobin.

Stepping eagerly into advocacy, he became a member of the Coalition Against Homophobia. While studying abroad in Germany, Kyle interned at Schwulen Beratung Berlin, a counseling and human services center for gay men. At the center, Kyle spent four months interning in the geriatrics and HIV/AIDS prevention departments. This only deepened his commitment to supporting at-risk and marginalized communities.



In 2007 Kyle Martz graduated from Whitman with degrees in German Studies and Gender Studies. As a senior, he was awarded a Foreign Language Teaching Assistant scholarship from the Fulbright Commission to teach English as a second language in Germany. In his application, Kyle said his plan was to use "cultural 'points of orientation,' such as classic and contemporary literature, film and music to compare and contrast cultures" and help German students better understand U.S. culture.



After returning from Germany in 2011, Kyle worked as an international admissions assistant for Oregon State University in Corvallis and a preschool teacher in Newport, Oregon. He returned to Whitman as the supervisor and program assistant for the Glover Alston Center in 2012.

In 2015, Kyle began serving as the college's International Student and Scholar Advisor. In this role, he assisted current and prospective international students and alumni with the logistics of attending college in the United States.

His personal insight into the Whitman student experience helped him connect closely with the students he worked. Within the Whitman community, as a mentor, advocate, and friend for international students and LGBTQIA+ students, Kyle touched countless lives in deeply significant ways.

Kyle did not limit the sharing of his vibrance, passion, and compassion to his professional life, however. Outside the college he worked with the Walla Walla Diversity Coalition on programming and events to support multiculturalism. He served as secretary of Community Pride Walla Walla and was also a member of the Walla Walla Immigrant Rights Coalition.

Dedicated to advocacy and diversity, Kyle worked tirelessly to improve the lives of others, which makes the fact that his own life was ended so abruptly and violently an even greater tragedy. If his memory is allowed to fade from the very institution he dedicated so much of his time and talent to, this tragedy will be compounded further. Thus, we propose "All the Rare Birds" as a celebration of Kyle and of the diversity he sought to foster.



Source: <https://www.whitman.edu/whitman-stories/kyle-martz>

Inspiration: About the Proposed Artwork

While evocative of some of the tremendous trees that populate the Whitman campus and Walla Walla's Pioneer Park, the tree form in "All the Rare Birds" also references the "Tree of Life."

The tree of life design is a large tree with roots and branches enclosed in a circle. The roots of the tree almost mirror the spreading branches, providing balance and symmetry. Throughout the ages, interpretations of the tree of life symbol have evolved, however, the fundamental elements remain a flourishing tree with strong roots contained inside a circle.

The tree of life symbol is ancient. In fact, this iconic imagery is almost as old as humans. The tree of life has representation in Christian and Ancient Egyptian narrative. Its imagery also exists in Buddhist, African, Turkish, and Celtic cultures.

Though these systems of culture and theology reflect multicultural ideals, there are unifying strains. Namely, the tree of life commonly symbolizes a connection to the afterlife, ancestral roots, and divinity.

There are multiple interpretations of the tree of life symbol. Most popularly it represents connection and unity. However, the evolution and depth of this design is multi-layered.

- **Connection:** Circles represent connectivity and inclusion. The roots of the tree reach deep into the earth while the abundant leaves flesh out and upward. The tree poses as the linchpin, connecting the earth and sky is symbolic of how we are all connected by the circle of life.
- **Strength:** Trees are deeply rooted pillars of strength, often surviving storms and natural disasters. It takes profound strength to uproot a tree, which is why this symbol represents strength and stability.
- **Growth:** From a tiny seed to sapling to fully mature, trees are in a continuous cycle of growth. As humans, we never stop growing but constantly absorb new information and knowledge.
- **Rebirth:** With each new season, the trees shift and change. They grow and adapt with each season, each bringing a new opportunity to change. As humans, we endure the seasons of our lives, just like trees.
- **Family:** Trees represent a connection, so it's no surprise that we use a family tree to connect our heritage and ancestry. With each new branch representing a new life. The circle represents a cycle of birth and life.
- **Tranquility:** Trees provide shelter, peace, and tranquility and evoke feelings of calm and serenity.

While the tree image in "All the Rare Birds" provides the foundation of the composition, equally important will be the colorful avians occupying its branches.

Though there is a memorial aspect to this proposed piece, its intention is actually celebration. The title of the work honors the "rare bird" Kyle Martz was and simultaneously acknowledges the many others who have roosted in Whitman's branches on the path of their life's migration.

Sources: <https://houseoflor.com/the-tree-of-life-symbol/>

Other tree of life images:



Haitian “Tree of Life” hand hammered and cut steel, artist unknown 2015



South American “Árboles de la Vida”

<https://www.finearttapestries.com/arboles-de-la-vida-wall-tapes-try/>



17th-century depiction of the tree of life in the Palace of Shaki Khans, Azerbaijan



Armenian, bird and branch motif, hand-painted ceramic tiles

About the Artist: Daniel Forbes

We have selected artist Daniel Forbes for this commission. Like Kyle, Daniel is a Whitman alum, a former Whitman employee and member of the David Nord Award Committee, and a member of Walla Walla's LGBTQIA+ community.

Forbes graduated from Whitman College in 1993, receiving a BA in studio art with an emphasis in ceramics and sculpture. He received his MFA in Studio Art from Vermont College of Union Institute and University in Montpelier, VT in 2007.

His sculptures have been displayed largely in the Northwest through solo and group shows in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, and California. He has also exhibited in Colorado, Alaska, Maryland, and Connecticut. Although he spent his childhood in the Boise/Meridian, ID area, for the last 33 years he has lived and maintained his studio in Walla Walla, WA.

Forbes is drawn to the found-object assemblage method of making objects because of the symbolism it holds in joining disparate and often unrelated objects together to create something new/whole. "There is something healing in gathering discarded fragments and bringing them together." He also personally relates deeply to the concept of this work's "assembled anatomy."

Using repurposed materials, his assemblage process also functions as a form of recycling. This environmental aspect of artmaking is significant for him.

Examples of Daniel's assembled works (painted and unpainted)"





