



## Street painting is finally legal in Madison. So why don't we have any?



MAY 30, 2014 11:00 AM • BY [LINDSAY CHRISTIANS](#) | [THE CAPITAL TIMES](#)

Last summer, inspired by [colorful street mandalas](#) popping up around cities like Portland, Oregon, Madison finally [passed its own street painting ordinance](#) after some five years of discussion.

Street art projects "help neighbors come together and create a sense of place in their neighborhood," near east side Ald. Marsha Rummel, who drafted the law, [said at the](#)

[time](#). "There's something about public art that brings people together."

But nearly a year after the ordinance passed, the only color on Madison streets is [bright green bike paths](#). What is taking so long?

"It could be people didn't know they could do it now," said Karin Wolf, arts coordinator for the city of Madison. "There was no big champion of pavement painting that was like, 'Oh, I really want to do one of these projects.'"

The Madison Arts Commission, which has set aside \$2,500 each for four pilot street art paintings on the north, south, east and west sides, would have "loved" to start the work last summer, Wolf said.

But nobody came forward. So Wolf reached out to Sharon Kilfoy, founder of the [Madison Mural Program](#), and asked for help.

Kilfoy started the mural program earlier this year with the goal of bringing wall art to more areas in town. A prolific muralist, she runs the Williamson Street Art Center and created 10 Madison area murals, all with community support, in 2013.

Kilfoy is now that "champion of pavement painting" the city has been looking for. She'll be the point person for four new street art projects starting in late summer, charged with finding the right affordable, non-skid paint, recruiting volunteers and pairing up artists and community groups.

"Part of the goal is to be able to go into neighborhoods that are not as rich in the arts as others might possibly be," Kilfoy said. "We're pretty settled on some locations, others we're still trying nail down.

"We really want to involve neighborhoods in the process."

One neighborhood that may see some street art is Darbo/Worthington on the north east side. On the west side, she's hoping to work with the Wexford Ridge Neighborhood Center.

Another potential site, in the parking lot of the Urban League of Greater Madison in the Villager Shopping Center, would actually have been allowed under previous laws, since it's private property.

But Kilfoy is eyeing that one, too.

"There was a festival there last summer that seemed to be really well-received," she said.

While the ordinance does allow for street art, there are restrictions on where it can go and what it can look like. No street art is permitted on [major roads](#) or ["collector" streets](#) (which carry traffic from local, 25 mile-an-hour streets to arterials).

Paint should be somehow non-skid, so people don't slip, and the design for the art must be decorative. It can't include anything with slogans, numbers or symbols, nor can it contain anything commercial.

"There's a limitation on words," said Rebecca Cnare, an urban design planner with the city. Cnare has seen crosswalks painted to look like piano keys and soccer balls.

"You can do a lot with just two colors," she said.

Once a design is chosen, 60 percent of the residents and businesses in a 200-foot radius have to sign off on it.

"I wouldn't want something popping up on my street that I didn't feel invested in or aware of," Wolf said.

Creating a street painting can take a fair amount of effort, for everything from cleaning the street and tracing the pattern to providing food for the volunteers who fill in the color.

And after all that effort, the artwork may not last very long.

Last summer, Wolf helped paint [Reginald Baylor's "A Common Denominator"](#) on a street in Milwaukee, kneeling on the hot pavement for hours.

"It was a really intense process," she said. "It took all day ... and it wore off in a couple days. I was sore longer than the mural lasted."

Still, both Wolf and Kilfoy have faith in the power of street art to bring communities together. Wolf doesn't regret her work on the Milwaukee piece.

"It was an amazing process and I can see why communities do it," Wolf said. "I felt really connected to everybody I was creating this mural with."

Kilfoy also cited the Portland project, [City Repair](#), as inspiration. Intersection art there has included boldly colored geometric patterns, suns, moons, blue and green globes, trees and natural creatures.

"On their website, they talk about people who have lived in the same neighborhood for many years, never having met one another," Kilfoy said. "But then they come down and look at the mural and start talking and meeting each other."

Kilfoy already has some artists in mind, too, like [Philip Salamone](#). Salamone teaches at the University of Wisconsin's Continuing Studies program and recently created [an elaborate "ice cave" mural at Epic Systems in Verona](#).

"We want to take these few through a process to figure out what are the holes, what do people have to do to make this happen," Kilfoy said. "We start to begin to train artists of color, artists from neighborhoods ... places other than the east side to do community work."

"Not all artists are going to want to do this kind of work. We need to do a few and learn from the process, and hopefully have a bunch of these happen."