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Snap a picture of Monroe Street's 'MADISON' mural before it's gone

By Jonas Tijerino

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The "MADISON" mural on Monroe Street is set to come down this summer.

ASHLEY RODRIGUEZ

Madison mural artist Triangulador learned in early May that his Monroe Street mural, “MADISON,” must come down — but he’s not mourning the loss of his well-known artwork.

He wants to celebrate the impermanence of the art, and he’s encouraging Madisonians to do the same.

The vibrant “MADISON” mural, which adorns the Lauer Realty Group building at 2526 Monroe St., went up in 2020. The mural, a collaboration between artists Liubóv Szwako (Triangulador) and Henrique Nardi, will be torn down this summer because of water damage in the bricks. Szwako announced the mural’s end via a [Reddit post](#).

Water damage is one of the dangers of commissioning murals for brick surfaces, said Karin Wolf, the city of Madison’s arts and culture administrator. General wear and tear is the most common reason a mural comes down, followed by vandalism and redevelopment.



Some of the structural damage peeks through the “MADISON” mural, made in 2020 by Liubóv Szwako (Triangulador) and Henrique Nardi.

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Wolf warns that Madisonians interested in commissioning a mural for their property should consider the most appropriate option for their building type. In some cases, like with the “MADISON” mural, painting directly onto brick can accelerate structural damage.

Bricks are porous, absorbing rain and snow throughout the year. When painted over, water is trapped in the pores, subjecting the bricks to a process called freeze-thawing. As the trapped water freezes and expands due to changing weather, the bricks begin to crack and chip, decreasing the structural integrity of the building.

This is what happened to the “MADISON” mural and one of the reasons it will not be repainted.



The mural shows some of the structural damage from the deteriorating brick below. The owners of Lauer Realty are replacing the brick and have no plans to replace the mural.

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“If you’re paying a lot of money to get your walls back to where they need to be and painting them damages them, why would you do that?” Szwako said.

The “MADISON” mural was privately commissioned by Liz Lauer, who owns the building. Szwako said he and Lauer decided not to pursue remaking the mural because of how much it would cost to build the wall, the risk of damaging the

building again and the artist's personal drive to move on to the next thing that inspires him.

“People hire the same artists to come and restore (murals) but I’m more like ‘Let’s do something different,’” Szwako said. “It’s just temporary. We’re just here for a second and it’s just part of the excitement.”



The “M” in the “MADISON” mural has the most damage, with many of the original bricks peeking out and some of the paint flaking off due to brick damage.

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Make an end-of-mural-life plan

Wolf noted that murals are not meant to be permanent fixtures, though property owners and artists can take precautions to extend the lifespan of their work.

“We encourage people to use a substrate that can be removed, like aluminum panel covered with poly tab material,” Wolf said. “That way (the mural) can be screwed into the wall and removed if need be and it doesn’t deteriorate.”

Poly tab, also known as parachute cloth, is a breathable fabric that can be easily applied to and removed from walls. When applied to brick, poly tab allows airflow and moisture to escape, minimizing the risk of freeze-thaw.

Wolf encourages community organizations to consider an “end of life plan” for their murals. Essentially, they should know what they want to do when maintenance becomes too cost prohibitive or the art gets damaged.

Part of that plan should include looping artists into the decision-making process for what happens to the mural, Wolf said. In some cases, a mural might be preservable. If painted on panels, an artist could choose to take it down and store it for future use elsewhere.



The “MADISON” mural on the Lauer Realty Group building at 2526 Monroe St. was commissioned in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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While the “MADISON” mural is going away, the community can expect to see new art pop up around town. Bayview Townhomes recently unveiled a new mural created by Cancun-based artist Marisol D’Estrabeau. A piece by Richie Morales, “Siempre Aprendiendo,” will make its official debut May 31 at 2200 Pennsylvania Ave.

Recently the city of Madison unveiled “Art Trucks,” a new project that transforms some of Madison’s garbage trucks into rolling murals. The first two trucks, featuring murals by artists Catherine Capellaro and Rachel Christopoulos, can be found roaming west of South Park Street and along the isthmus respectively.

As Szwako prepares to say goodbye to his mural, he is encouraging the community to get creative and take photos with his art to commemorate the end.

Szwako is running a giveaway in which he will give the participant with the “most creative” photo an original 22-by-30-inch painting. When Michelle Waldeck, owner of Monroe Street Framing, found out about the mural coming down and the giveaway, she offered to frame the painting for the winner.

“It’s a beautiful thing,” Szwako said. “You do things for the love of doing them and then you see other people being like ‘I want to help you and get the word out.’ It’s what community is about.”

Lauer and Szwako estimate construction on the new wall will begin in four to eight weeks. People interested in participating in Szwako’s giveaway should submit their photos to info@triangulador.com with the subject line “Last One B4 it’s gone.”

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