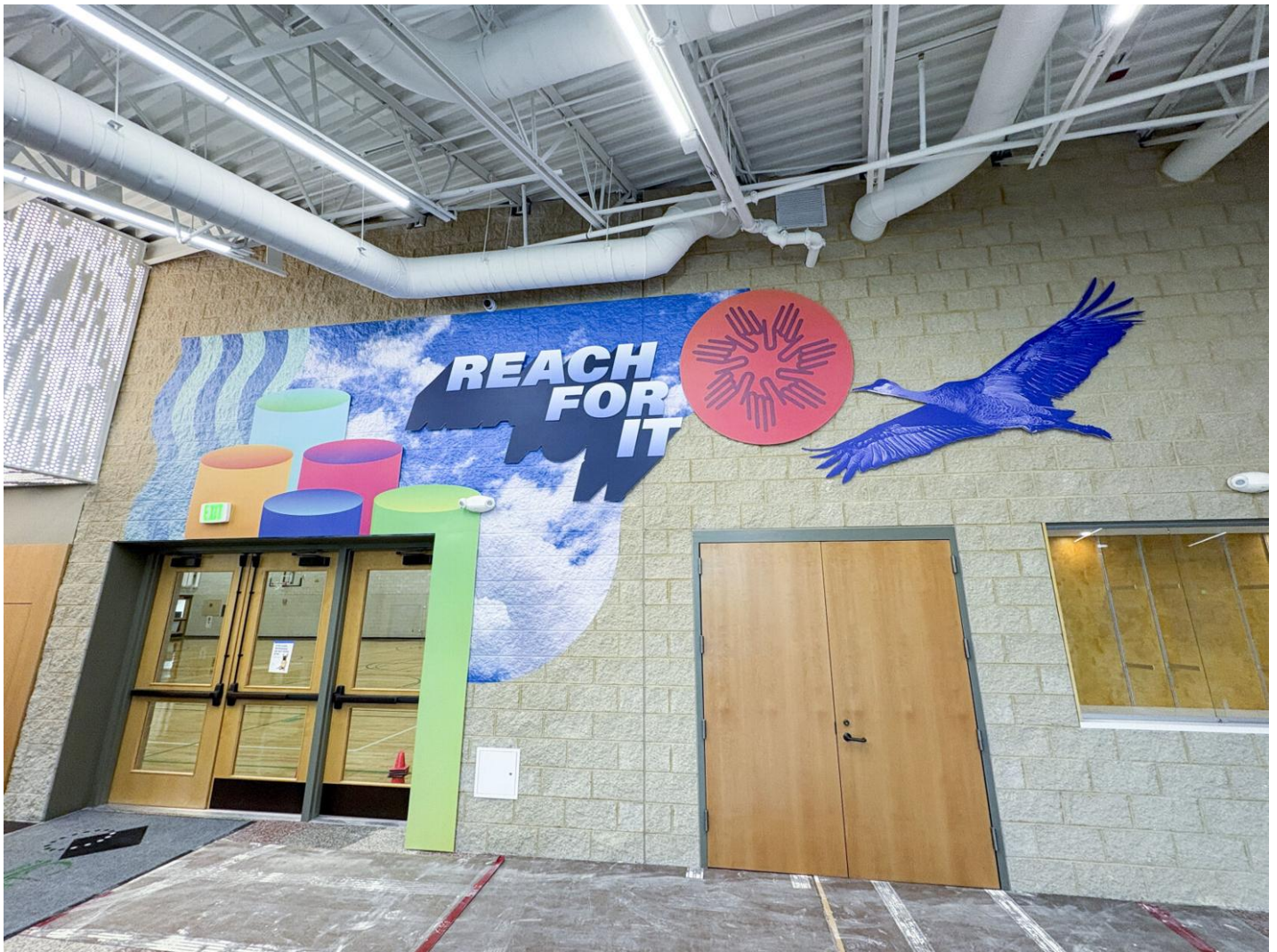


https://captimes.com/entertainment/arts/reach-for-it-public-art-inspires-at-warner-park/article_fe77641a-ba5b-4e0b-b8e3-cbb1dbf548bf.html

'Reach For It' public art inspires at Warner Park

By Dauntae Green

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"Reach For It," public art at Warner Park, was designed to inspire the community to reach for their goals.

Courtesy of Adam Van Vreede

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“Reach For It” is a public art installation created by the collaboration of Madison Metropolitan School District students and University of Wisconsin-Madison art professor Faisal Abdu'Allah.

Madison Arts Commission and several city agencies also worked together toward a combined vision for an installation in the Warner Park Community Recreation Center.

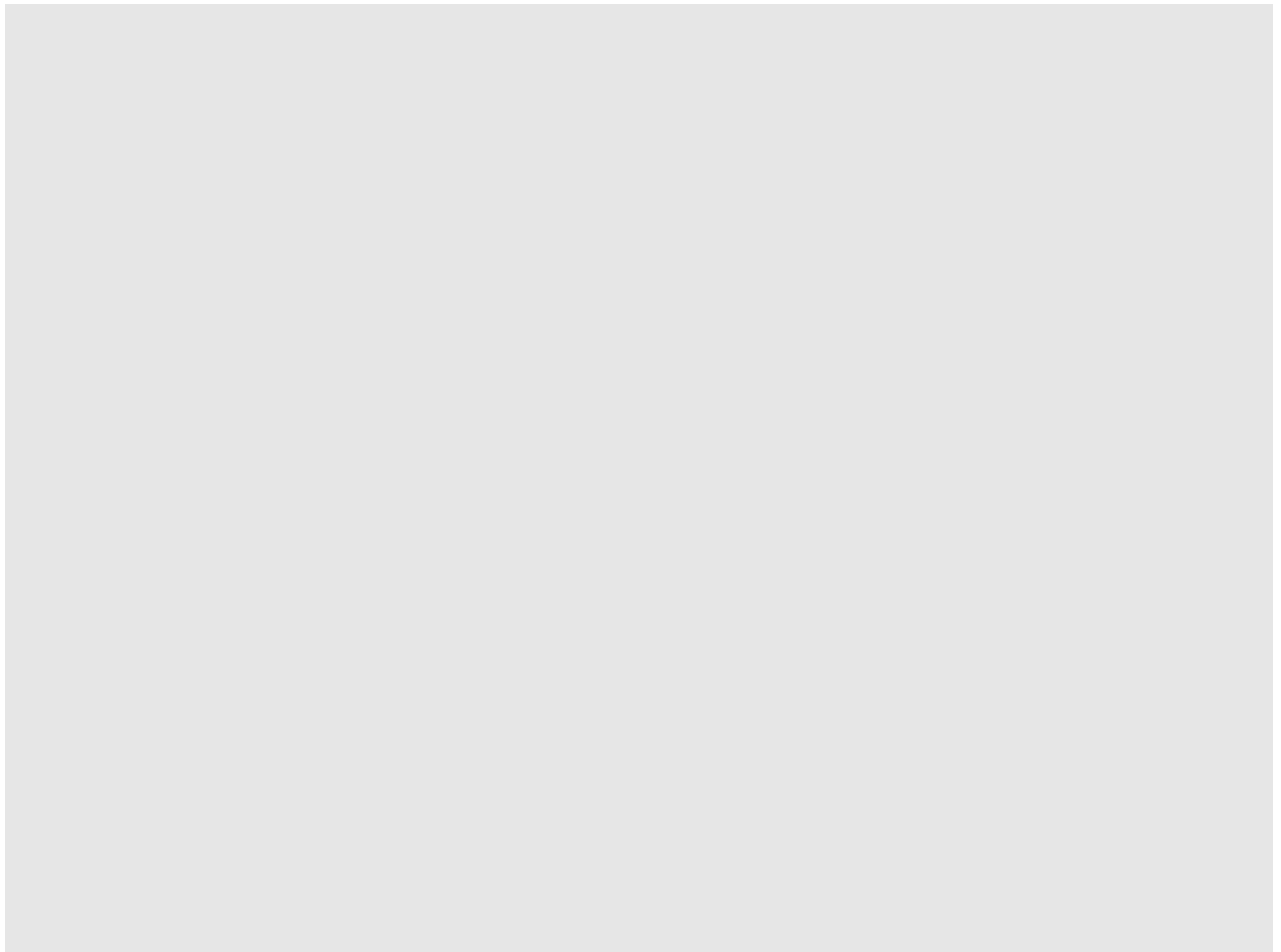
The idea was to create a piece of public art alongside the students, Abdu'Allah said, “not me parachuting in creating something detached from their own experiences, but something that was a dance ... almost like a piece that was made by a symphony.”

On July 8, Warner Park had a celebration and ribbon cutting ceremony for its new expansion to show off the newest parts of the facilities, including “Reach For It.”

When people enter the main lobby from the hallway, the art piece shows a sandhill crane’s phases of flight moving upward counterclockwise towards the positive message “Reach For It.”

In the window, there are black silhouettes of human figures painted with a sandhill crane inside the sun. Another part of the installation shows a figure shooting a basketball into a hoop with clouds in the background, and there is a pathway leading towards Lady Liberty.

The title “Reach For It” came from the idea that inside each person is the desire to “reach for something,” Abdu’Allah said.



The silhouettes in "Reach For It" act as representations of people that come to the center, to guide them through the installation's story.

Courtesy of Adam Van Vreede

Creativity from students

The Warner Park Public Art Project began in the spring of 2025. Abdu'Allah worked with 19 MMSD students for eight weeks, each session lasting two and a half hours, with students using sketchbooks to record their ideas and thoughts between classes.

One of the many ways that Abdu'Allah helped the students gain inspiration for the project was being in the space itself. He gave them a tour during the construction process to help them understand the space more.

A city of Madison website [about the project](#) quoted Abdu'Allah: "Artists have long carried the task of revealing what lies just beyond ordinary sight, guiding society through difficult questions, and uncovering the quiet beauty hidden in plain view."

The students explored creative skills in art such as painting, photography, drawing and design. The teaching assistants and documentarians provided inspiration, captured the process, and gave them introductions to many types of the creative process.

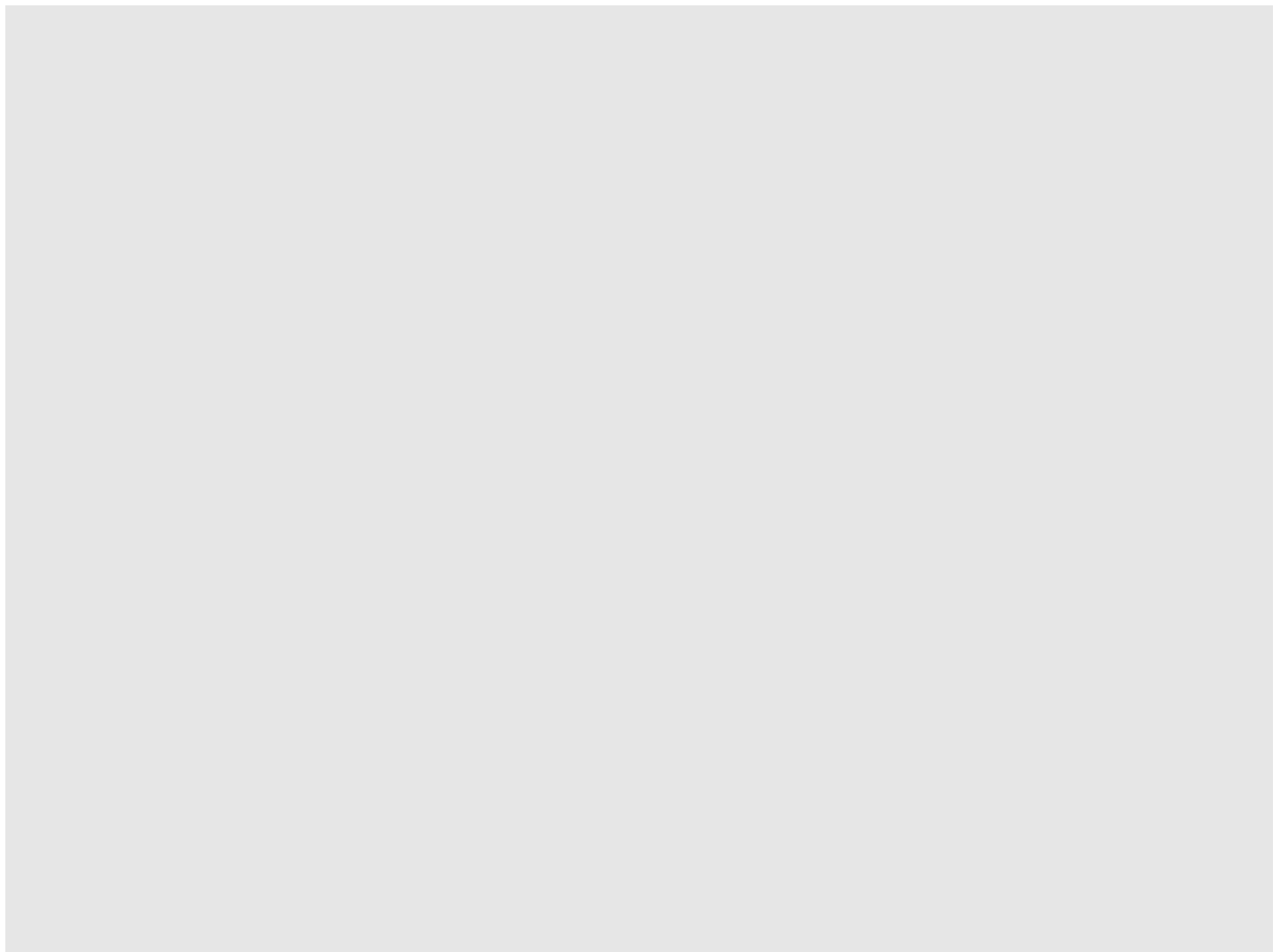
"It's very important to create a community.... I try to find a way to understand the students, find out where they're coming from, what their interests are, (bring) out some of their creative ideas," said Abdu'Allah.

The students wanted the installation to help people see themselves. They made the black silhouettes of themselves from portraits of their bodies and printed them onto white paper. Abdu'Allah explained that the silhouettes were to use

their bodies as tools to help guide them through the story.

“(The silhouette was) important,” he said. “Maybe you're not recognized immediately, but your silhouette could be a representation of everybody else. When someone comes to this place, they can see themselves in that work, and it becomes much more universal.”

Sandhill cranes are well known on Madison’s north side. Abdu'Allah had the students use his analog camera to take photos of the cranes in the area, and they used them as one of the signifiers representing the center.



"Reach For It" is a new installation created by MMSD students and artist Faisal Abdu'Allah at Warner Park.

Courtesy of Adam Van Vreede

Imagination in motion

Another part of their creative process was a workshop session with former Wisconsin Badgers basketball player Kamari McGee. McGee contributed by offering insights for students into the relationship between art and sports. This inspired the idea of taking photos of the students shooting a basketball, which became part of the installation.

Abu'Allah spoke about how McGee made the students think more about how imagination doesn't only exist with pen and paper, but in movement too.

This discussion created the opportunity for the students to think critically about the purpose of public art and its connection to the community.

“They wanted colors that were aspirational colors that they felt spoke to a number of different kinds of ideas,” Abdu'Allah said. “The colors were emotionally chosen.” The colors that Abdu'Allah speaks of are orange, light green, teal and magenta; they can be seen in the cylinders and the message.

The students and Abdu'Allah ended up collaborating with local graffiti artist Dave Gutkowski, who makes work under the name [@MFDave247](#). Gutkowski was given three suggestions, and he painted the sandhill crane to draw the viewer's attention. The fabrication and installation was by Wild Blue Technologies.

This public art installation was to act as a reflection for the community with its message and that it tells the community's story. Abdu'Allah spoke about the lesson he learned from this collaboration with these students.

“That group (of students) showed their empathy and understanding. They made me an advocate, and they've taught me to be better,” said Abdu'Allah.

Abdu'Allah explained that it is really important that this installation be made within the community, that the ideas are from them.

The installation, he said, “reflects a moment in the consciousness of these young people.” The students “are very good examples of what it means to show up.”

Dauntae Green is reporting for the Cap Times in 2026 as a David Maraniss Fellow. He is pursuing a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Email story ideas and tips to Dauntae at dgreen@captimes.com.

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Dauntae Green