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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

"The Surrealistic Mural of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream"

A Thesis Submitted to the
University Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
with Upper Division Honors

Department of Art

by

Randy A. Halverson

DeKalb, Illinois

May 11, 1996

HONORS CAPSTONE PROJECT - MURAL

Student name: RANDY A. HALVERSON

Approved by: JAY PAUL BELL

Department of: SCHOOL OF ART

Date: 5/28/96

HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT

THESIS SUBMISSION FORM

ARTIST: Randy A. Halverson

THESIS TITLE: "The Surrealistic Mural of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream"

ADVISOR: Jay Paul Bell

ADVISOR'S DEPT: ART

DISCIPLINE: Illustration

YEAR: 1996

LOCATION: Holmes Student Center \ Diversions Show Lounge

The focus of the mural is to express the idea of unity of every race. I decided to use Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech as a basic structural idea or motif. There is one specific quote from the speech that is depicted in the mural. It proclaims: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

To compliment the "I have a dream" motif, I decided to utilize the dream-like style of Surrealism. According to art historians, "The Surrealists were determined to explore the inner world of the psyche, the realm of fantasy and the unconscious. Inspired in part by the ideas of the psychoanalysts Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists were especially interested in the nature of dreams. They viewed dreams as occurring at the level at which all human consciousness connects and as constituting the arena in which people could move beyond the constricting forces of their environment to re-engage with the deeper selves that society had long suppressed."

Let us now enter into the surrealistic world of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream. Starting from the left side of the mural, we see a black child carefully smoothing out the landscape which symbolizes the idea of a new beginning. Birds have always been a symbol for freedom, so to emphasize the idea of the land of the free, a bird begins to form in the land. From the eye of the bird fly several doves which correlate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s belief of achieving freedom through peace. Next, we see the Campus Life Building emerging from the land which is to say that the building is founded on the ideas of freedom and equality.

To accentuate this idea, a beam of light is emitted from the rotunda with books circling around it, and with the shape of the mountains in the background and the top of the rotunda, the basic look of the "Balance of Equality" sculpture is created. The beam of light creates the cloud formations and emerging from the clouds is an ornate vase with relief forms of children working together. The vase represents the ideals of humanity which pours out its divine knowledge onto the head of a child as a symbol of consciousness. The child is now in deep thought as its starry eyes look up in wonder. The idea of a pure conscience is portrayed by the elements of ideals being filtered through the innocent mind of the child. We see that the body of the child is being filled with the warmth of these golden elements and that the ideals rest within the lap of the child. These ideals of humanity are represented by the element of water because water is one of the vital aspects in giving and sustaining life.

In the center of the mural we find the shadowy existence of the Altgeld castle appearing in the sky. This portrays the dream of the founding institution of education for the Northern Illinois region. To the right of the castle we see the formation of a nebula with the mascot of the university charging out from it. The symbolism here is to correlate the idea of a nebula system giving birth to stars with the process of the university giving an education to its students so that we, as N.I.U. Huskies, will shine as bright as the stars.

Below, we see five graduates and within their grasp is the basic structure of the vase. The vase has been altered to depict the elements of the universe. The two graduates at the left hold up an icon of the planets and the graduate in the middle is reaching up to an icon of the sun. Next to her is a graduate who is holding up the spout of the vase

which pours out the divine knowledge of humanity's ideals and with them are the stars. The last graduate holds in his hand the symbol of an educated mind, the diploma. All of this is to show that by having a high degree of education, the universe is at your command.

Below the graduates I have added a bridge that extends out of the picture plane from a natural setting to invite the viewer into this perfect nation. The bridge represents humankind's capability to connect the gaps between all races. Because nature reflects the influences of humans it is necessary that the two should come together in a perfect union to flourish. To accentuate this idea, the combination of the bridge and its reflection begin to form a fish which is a symbol of fertility.

Next, we see a golden icon of a child which symbolizes the epitome of the value of children. It is the element of humanity's ideals that have made the child golden, and if we were to treasure the children of the world as highly as gold they would be "sitting on top of the world." To accentuate these ideas, I have placed the quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech in space to show that his message is as eternal as the constellations.

Finally, we see a child being formed by a green aura coming from the earth. The aura symbolizes the child's spirit, and the color green is to symbolize the growth of the child's spirit as it is lifted from this world by the encouragement of humanity. From here, a new world begins to take shape in the mind of the child which becomes so real that a gesture is made to reach out and make it happen!

Randy A. Halverson 1996