Art is Going to Get Us Through

When I first started brainstorming ideas in the first stages of the creation of the mural I asked myself a few questions. How am I going to represent each child attending Ecole Frank Ross so that they can look up and see themselves in the mural? How am I going to represent the school and the spirit of the Bulldog? Lastly, how am I going to represent Dawson Creek?

The last question was the first one I answered. I looked around the city and I could see a lot of representation of the past and history of Dawson Creek and decided that wasn't the direction I wanted to go in. Although remembering our history is very important to building a solid foundation it also isn't the direction we are heading in. As I drove around I was inspired by more modern installations like the wind turbines. The peace region is known for producing energy and I wanted to recognize the greener side of energy that this area is also known for, the wind farm. It is one of the defining features that I first noticed when coming to Dawson Creek back in 2013. The stunning ridge line set against the setting sun is particularly personal as I have collected a lot of fond memories hiking and sharing campfires with others in an around the wind park. I also wanted to acknowledge the historical year that 2020 was especially for students and educators. As a nod to them, I incorporated 20 wind turbines into the image.

Second, I chose the grain elevator not as a historical building but to represent the art gallery, existing artists and up and coming artists in the community. Dawson Creek and the surrounding area has a richly creative and diverse population that has a lot to offer this community. Art in all it's wonderful forms provides a quality of life that can only be expressed through its creativity. One of my favourite quotes during the pandemic was from Mo Willems, a beloved children's author and artist, who said “Science is going to get us out of this-but art is going to get us through this.” It is my hope that this project will become a part of the “through” that he referred to.

Third, I think it would be difficult to represent Dawson Creek without agriculture. Agriculture has reshaped the land and has become, arguably it's most defining feature. Looking out over Dawson Creek at the patchwork of fields brings up expansive feelings as swatches of color dot the hillsides as far as the eye can see. Another thing I was drawn to was the phenomenal imagery of the canola fields in full bloom. It is difficult to capture the almost fluorescent color of the canola flower. Having it juxtaposed with some of the deep greens or bright green patches of the pea shoots only brings out it's vibrancy. Then as some fields dry up and are almost ready to harvest for hay you see the ebb and flow of the wind running through the golden fields. It is an experience to behold and it overcomes the senses. Crops wind up finding themselves used in products all over the world and it reminds me of the impact and far reaching effects of a tiny seed.

As for the second question, I looked to the school principal Mr. Shaun Henry for guidance and inspiration. We wanted all to feel welcomed to the school and I interpreted that quite literally by adding both English and French wording of Welcome-Bienvenue to the front door. Mr. Henry also wanted to show the “4 Pillars” of Ecole Frank Ross that describe the qualities of a Bulldog. These are foundational qualities that embody the students and staff of the school. Again, I used quite a literal interpretation by framing out the existing pillars and adding both the French and English words to the columns. I wanted to use different fonts to differentiate between the English students and the French students and staff, however, I chose to keep them on the same pillar to show that they are different but not separate. Both are integral parts of the school, both are unique to each other but both embody the same spirit of Calm-Calme, Courageous-Courageux, Determined-Determiner and Kind-Gentil.

Here we come to the first question. I purposefully chose ambiguous features and clothing so that every child, regardless of gender, age or self-expression might be able to see themselves in the child represented in the mural. I wanted them to be elevated as it is my hopes that their experience in Ecole Frank Ross and Dawson Creek would elevate them to the person they are and will become. We all have something incredible inside just waiting to be revealed. It is our duty, as the previous generations, to the younger generations to acknowledge it, encourage it, empower it and nourish it so that the next generation of thinkers, innovators, creators and givers can live a life of impact by not only what they choose to do but by who they are. This is why I chose to outfit our child with a cape, symbolizing bravery. Daring to be yourself is one of the bravest things you can do.

Last, but not least, the night sky. Night represents what is internal and the sky represents expanse and endless possibilities. Stars represent wishes, they represent individuality, they represent the far reaching affects of a singular thing. Throughout history and across most cultures, people have looked to the night sky for meaning and guidance. In my mural, this is no different. I wanted the night sky full of its stars and constellations to represent every students potential and authentic expression of themselves. School doesn't just help us figure out what career we want to serve in but it also helps us discover who we are and to develop the skills needed to thrive, whether it's how we get along with each other, finish projects on time, the math used for buying your groceries, or writing skills to express yourself in a journal. No two students have the same experience of school and the outcome is intensely varied. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the staff and teachers that helped shape us and draw out our true selves. Those that shine a light on what brings us joy and helps us to make it a reality hold places in our hearts that impact us our whole lives. When looking for yourself who do you find in the night sky?

I find great pleasure in being offered this opportunity to share one of my joys with you.

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