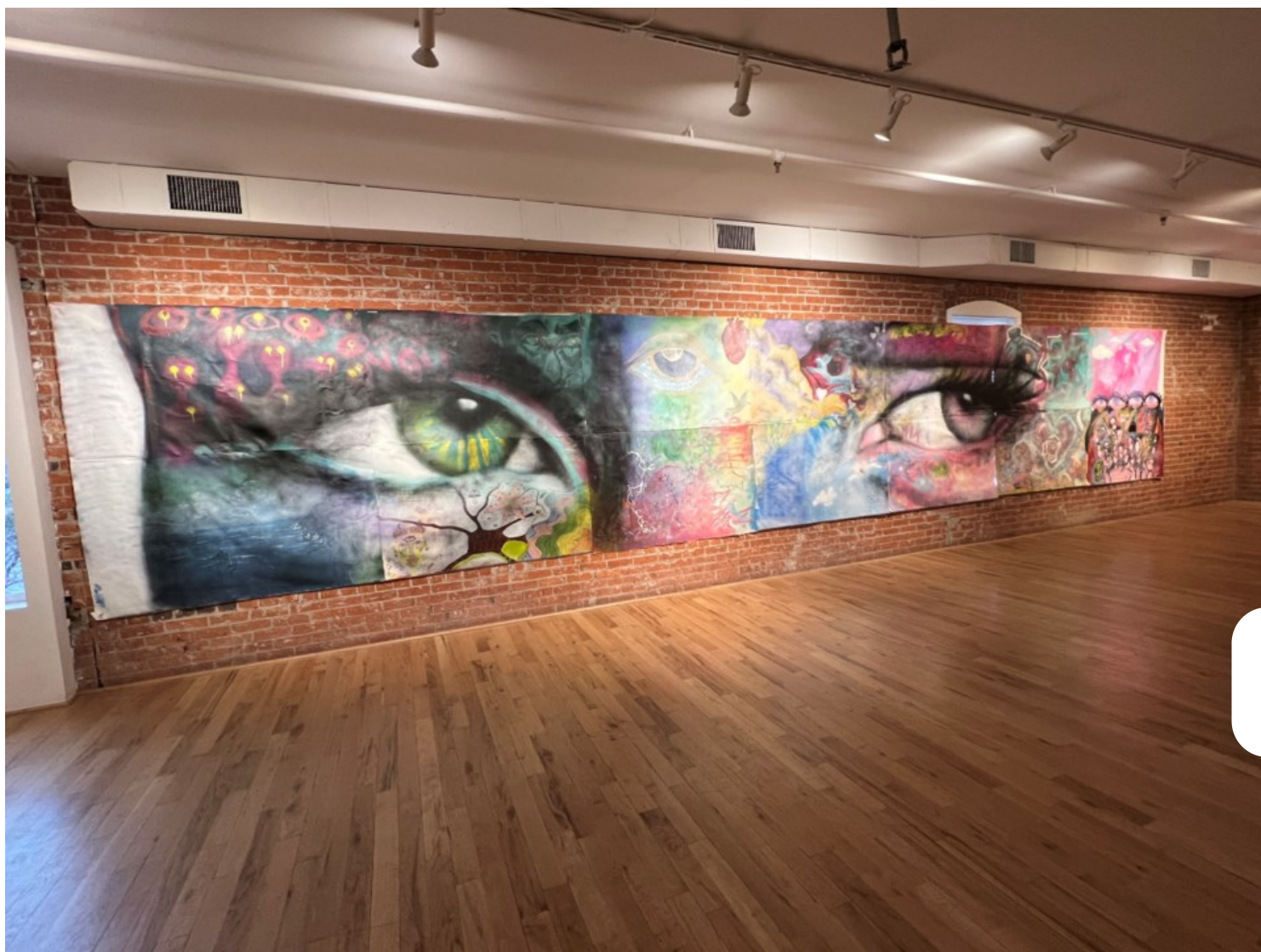


Teens come together to create a mural with a message

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"Visions" collaborative spray paint mural by Studio Project Teens & Mentor Artist AG PNT. Images courtesy of BMoCA.

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In response to a series of tragic drug overdoses in the community, a group of teens from the Studio Project, a program created by the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, or BMoCA, and co-facilitated by The Firehouse Art Center, have joined forces to tackle the issue of teen drug abuse with a mural titled 'Visions'.

Under the guidance of prominent artist AG PNT—who unearthed a street art movement in Denver’s RiNo Art District—these passionate young individuals have created a collaborative mural that not only highlights the severity of the problem but also emphasizes the need for compassion, community support and a critical examination of the issue.

Elaine Waterman, the program coordinator of the Studio Project and Executive Director of The Firehouse Art Center, explained that the abstract nature of the ‘Visions’ mural is intended to spark conversation and promote understanding around the issue of teen drug abuse.

"The teens didn't want to create art that was black and white where drugs are bad and people that use drugs are bad," Waterman said. "They wanted to use abstraction to lead to more discussions about why people may have resorted to drug use, and then how to help."

BMoCA actively promotes its program to high school teachers in Boulder County, encouraging them to share the opportunity with their students. Applications for the fall and spring sessions open at the beginning of the semester, and interested students are encouraged to apply. Waterman conducts interviews with all applicants to ensure their passion for art and commitment to attending weekly meetings.

Throughout the semester, participants gather at BMoCA to discuss various social justice topics. The group collectively votes on a specific issue to focus on from a broad spectrum of topics, allowing students to explore and address a diverse array of social concerns.

"It's giving them that professional development experience that might translate to something later on in their life, regardless of whether they go into art as a career or in college," said Melinda Laz, Outreach Education Manager at BMoCA. "It's more about having this experience of collaboration, figuring things out together, and maybe arguing for their point of view. I think those life skills are a crucial part of the program."

The teens involved were instrumental in choosing AG PNT as their mentor, ensuring that they had an experienced guide throughout the process. AG PNT provided valuable insights into various aspects of mural creation, from determining the best placement and establishing a coherent flow to imparting spray paint techniques.

By offering a glimpse into his studio, AG PNT demonstrated how professional artists operate and helped the teens understand the intricacies of the art world. Additionally, he played a crucial role in seamlessly connecting the individual canvases to form a unified, powerful image.

"This was a large collaborative art project, and they had to think about their own personal feelings about peer drug abuse and then work together with their canvas mates to blend their paintings together at the edges," Waterman said.

Despite the challenges faced during the project, such as busy schedules and finding a unified motif, the teens persevered and found a way to create a powerful piece of art. Waterman believes that the ‘Visions’ mural will inspire other communities to come together and tackle issues like teen drug abuse by starting the conversation and trusting young people to make mature decisions.

The 'Visions' opening reception will take place on Saturday, May 13, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Firehouse Art Center. During this event, students will be fundraising for Natural Highs: Healthy Alternatives to Drugs & Alcohol, an active prevention/intervention peer mentor program co-created by teens. This initiative aims to empower young people and their communities to make healthy lifestyle choices and cultivate a supportive peer environment.

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