

FOCUS ON PEOPLE

Ceramic frieze tells universal story of effort to make peace

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Fenn Martin is a peacemaker. He has accomplished that feat – not with political power or military might – but with his hands.

The Ohio Valley, Antigonish County artist is the creator of Making Peace, a ceramic frieze that now adorns a wall of the Coady International Institute's Gogan Family Gathering Hall.

At the unveiling March 15, Martin said he initiated an "investigation of what peace is" when he started the project, including conversations with Coady staff, participants and members of the Sisters of Saint Martha.

"I heard a series of stories that had some central themes," he said.

Martin said he was challenged to create a visual metaphor for complex ideas like harmony, democracy and interconnectedness. He added the focus became telling a universal story that celebrates personal, historical and international themes.

Martin said the resulting narrative is a coming together of diverse peoples to share a meal, to enjoy the much-sought "life of abundance" at the heart of the Antigonish Movement.

"It's an incredible honour to take part in a project of this scale," he said to the more than 100 people who attended the morning ceremony.

That day was not Martin's first in the Gogan Family Gathering Hall. While conducting the installation process four days earlier, which included the mounting of 27 tiles that comprise the piece, Martin talked to the *Casketer*.

"It was certainly a bit of a puzzle coming together," he agreed with a laugh.

The artwork, which includes three rows of nine clay tiles, weighs between 600 and 700 pounds. It was completed in one piece at his studio, but Martin had to dissect it for the move to its new home. Now re-assembled the artwork measures 10 feet wide, five feet high and varies from three to five inches in depth.

"I fired them myself in my shop," he said, noting his work on the piece began approximately eight months ago

with his concept creation.

For the last five or six months, Martin said it has been basically a full-time endeavour.

"I have been sculpting and piecing it together – adding and subtracting parts of it, making all the figures and so forth, and then firing it," he said.

Martin said he came up with the concept after his week or more research at the Coady, reminding of his conversations with "peacemakers."

"There are people from many different places and they are doing different types of actions.

"By bringing these people together, I wanted to create a narrative of community building and making peace," he said.

Martin said the piece includes a number of metaphors.

"One that I particularly enjoy is the aspect of food, using it as a metaphor for peace. People are sharing a meal," he explained.

There are also people casting seeds, seedlings, raw food and then prepared food as part of the work.

"All of sudden there are people at the table preparing to eat, so it is the whole gamut – a metaphor for growing peace – the whole cycle," he said.

Martin said this is the largest piece he has ever created.

"It was a huge opportunity for me to work at this scale. I have always dreamed of working at this scale and realizing a piece of this size," Martin said.

"This is like a dream job," he added.

Martin described the topic for the piece as "very fulfilling."

"I reflected a lot, thought a lot about it and put a lot of energy into it," he said.

Martin noted the effort was a team one, including Alana Wilson – who has worked with him on the project quite a bit. She is currently completing a ceramic residency in New Glasgow. Dave Laurence added his much needed carpentry skills to the installation process.

"There have been so many people who have helped make this possible," he said.

Martin said he thinks people will "invent their own stories with it and make it into a real conversation piece."

"I hope it inspires people to think about peace. I hope it inspires conversation," he said.

Wishing you peace

It did not take long for Martin to find out his hopes would be fulfilled. As soon as the curtain dropped and his creation was unveiled officially, it began. People were talking about the artist's creation and how it does inspire peace.

"It is spectacular," one of the visitors said as she rubbed her fingers along one of the tiles.

Many of the guests at the community celebration were members of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Martha, who contributed the financial gift that made Making Peace possible.

"We suggested an artistic creation that would speak to

the universal value of peace and that it would be placed within the St. F.X. campus," Marthas' congregation leader Sister Mary MacFarlane said.

"In a conversation with Coady administration following the completion of their new facilities, we supported the decision to commission a ceramic frieze by local artist Fenn Martin."

Sister MacFarlane said the Sisters were "delighted" with the results.

"Making Peace speaks of a movement, an energy that supports the development of relationships. It invites one to live in harmony, unity, communion and celebration.

"Here, on St. F.X. campus, particularly within the walls of the Coady, there is an extraordinary opportunity to model the kind of story of which this works speaks as you welcome students from around the world."

Sister MacFarlane said making the gift was a natural one, considering the congregation's "long-standing relationship" with St. F.X.

"[It is] a relationship that began with our founding in 1900 for the service of household management at what was then known as the College," she noted.

Sister MacFarlane said the piece's place in the Coady was

also a natural fit, calling Father Moses Coady a "dear friend and mentor" of the Sisters.

"The Marthas were an integral part of the development of the Antigonish Movement – both here on the campus and throughout eastern Nova Scotia," she said, noting the congregation's involvement with the Coady since its creation.

Sister MacFarlane congratulated Martin on his "extraordinary creation."

"You possess an exceptional gift," she said.

Interim Coady director Gord Cunningham commended the Marthas on their contribution.

"Making Peace is a meaningful, inspirational creation that captures what the original Antigonish Movement and today's Coady are all about – promoting a life of peace and abundance by using local resources to our collective advantage. We'll be proud to show this to our world leaders while they're on campus and to our many friends here in our local community."

As she wrapped up her remarks, Sister MacFarlane offered words that seemed to capture the theme of the occasion. She invited people to talk about peacemaking, offering a final thought from the Marthas.

"I wish you peace."



Ohio Valley artist Fenn Martin works on Making Peace in his studio. (Coady Institute photo)

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helps provide timely financial compensation to workers who are owed money when their employers go bankrupt or into receivership.

Engagement Announcement

Mr. & Mrs. Anthony and Carmel Benoit
of Pomquet, Antigonish County
are pleased to announce the engagement
and forthcoming marriage of their daughter

Noella Rose Benoit
to
Peter Alexander Massaro
son of Elizabeth and Sandy Massaro
of London, Ontario

