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Mayfest poster artist Matt Moffett's painting suits Tulsa event to a 'Tea'

Matt Moffett's art evokes a cup and saucer with a nod to Tulsa history and landmarks.

James D. Watts Jr.
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Artist Matt Moffett (left) shows off his art for the 2015 Mayfest poster to Jay Roberts and Kate Thomas at the unveiling Thursday. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

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he most difficult part about creating the official poster image for the Tulsa International Mayfest is keeping quiet.

T“I’ve been wanting to tell everyone about this ever since the Mayfest people approached me to do this,” said Matt Moffett, the artist for the 2015 Mayfest poster.

Moffett’s painting, “Tulsa: My Cup O’Tea,” was officially unveiled to the public at a ceremony Thursday at the Helmerich Research Center at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa.

Moffett’s painting is unique among Mayfest posters in one respect: It’s round, a painting on a 30-inch circular canvas.

“I just thought it would look cool on a T-shirt,” Moffett said, laughing.

The image features a gilt-edged teacup and saucer — Moffett used 24-karat gold leaf for the effect — that contains a number of Tulsa architectural landmarks: the BOK Tower, the Philtower, the Mid-Continent Building, the First Place Tower, the Blue Dome Building and the 320 South Boston Building, along with spires that recall the Boston Avenue United Methodist Church and Holy Family Cathedral.

On the teacup itself, painted so that it appears as a reflection, is an image of an early downtown Tulsa scene, giving the painting a sense of the past as well as the present.

“The idea is to show the rebirth of Tulsa’s downtown, which is something I’m very happy to see,” Moffett said. “I just wanted the painting to display my love for this city.”

The background of the painting is a vividly colored explosion of floral patterns.

“I was at a party recently, and a woman there had on this dress with a similar print,” Moffett said. “It looked so jubilant and happy that I asked to take a picture of it. And that became the background of the painting.”

Moffett was working on a master's degree in Spanish when he began painting. He wanted a portrait of his pet dog that had recently died but didn't want to pay the fee another artist wanted to charge.

That painting started Moffett on his self-taught career as an artist. He's done more than 1,200 pet portraits over the years and also does landscape and cityscape paintings.

Moffett, who taught at Eugene Fields Elementary and Zarrow International School, co-founded and directs the Tulsa Girls Arts Studio, providing art instruction for inner-city girls.

"I grew up going to Mayfest," Moffett said. "I've been a part of the Invitational Gallery for the past 12 years. But I really love everything about the festival — the art, the music, the people."

Moffett will also be opening a show of his paintings Friday at Dwelling Spaces, 119 S. Detroit Ave.

Titled "Tulsa Renaissance," the exhibit will showcase 20 of Moffett's paintings of the Tulsa cityscape. It will be on display through May 31.

"I call it 'Tulsa Renaissance' because that's what we're seeing happening right now in the downtown area and the surrounding neighborhoods," Moffett said. "But it also applies to the paintings themselves. All were done on canvases that I had used for other projects, so these surfaces are experiencing something of a renaissance of their own."

Tulsa International Mayfest will take place May 14-17 in downtown Tulsa.

The 43rd iteration of the spring arts festival, according to Mayfest chairwoman Mary Jo Sartain, will feature five indoor galleries showcasing more than 800 pieces of art by local artists, as well as the 120 artists and craftspeople from around the country displaying their wares along downtown's Main Street.

Posters with Moffett's image will be available to purchase at the merchandise tent at the corner of Fourth and Main streets during the festival. Posters signed by the artist are \$25; unsigned posters are \$15.

Moffett's original painting will be on display in the Mayfest Invitational Gallery, in the Williams Towers lobby at 1 W. Third St. The painting will be sold during the festival via a silent auction that will begin during the Invitational Gallery Opening party from 6-8 p.m. May 13.

Tickets to the opening are \$25. Call 918-582-6435 or email **comments@tulsamayfest.org** for information or to purchase.

Moffett's work will also be added to the Mayfest mural on the wall of the Hyatt Regency Hotel. Artist William Franklin, a former Mayfest poster artist, will re-create the image for the mural beginning Friday.

At Thursday's unveiling, Sartain revealed that she would be stepping down as festival chair at the end of May, after nine years working for Mayfest as a volunteer.

"You mean you've been doing this for nothing?" said her husband, actor Gailard Sartain. "We need to talk."

James D. Watts Jr. 918-581-8478

james.watts@tulsaworld.com

James D. Watts Jr.

Scene Writer

I write primarily about the visual, performing and literary arts. Phone: 918-581-8478