

[The Barnum Factory's Triple B \(Breanne Barnum Blog\)](#)

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More Than the Writing on the Wall

When Cazzie Hammond started the massive monster that now looms around the 2nd floor freight elevator, she was out of spray paint. Her energy was frenetic, kinetic, and she needed black paint NOW. I offered that we might have some in the 1st-floor storage space, but it was regular house paint. Her eyes glittered.

"Geehhht iiiittttt," she roared. I did. Then I watched her use a Sherman-Williams paint brush bring the thing to life – a red and black creature now devouring our 2nd-floor freight elevator with its toothy maw, oddly both scary and benevolent, like the angel reliefs in cathedrals.

Some big things are transforming The Factory's 2nd floor spaces. In addition to the monster chomping on the freight elevator, a 10-foot, young-looking animated black figure scowls petulantly from the hallway wall, his eyes shrouded by a low hat, a looming – and menacing – shadow flexing its muscle behind him. Beside him, a black superhero in a blue suit breaks through a wall.

Cazzie Hammond and Iven Jones, of the [Rebel Art Alliance](#), are bringing street art to the interior, and since my new office is also on the 2nd floor, I've had plenty of opportunity to watch them work. It's captivating – energetic and enigmatic. ["Immersive" art](#) has been blowing up in recent years, as is artists' and collectors' compulsion to move street art inside – especially in adaptive reuse spaces, like this former [Cold War spy station](#) in Russia.

"People are seeking experiences where they can be engaged in a more authentic and direct way, because so many of our communications are removed and facilitated through screens," said Mat Diafos Sweeney, artistic director of Four Larks, which creates installations in places like a former flower shop or a car repair garage.

Says site-specific curator John Wolf, "Visitors tell me they get such a visceral feeling from being in the space with the works and based on all the subconscious history that's happened here."

Just as in [the last triple B installment](#) (Breanne Barnum Blog) where I explored our attraction to gritty, patinaed spaces (for that same visceral feeling), I got to thinking about what compels artists to create large-scale art on interior surfaces. It's electrifying, transformative, sometimes almost mystical. So I ask.

“My whole life I’ve been drawing and painting on things I wasn’t supposed to,” says Cazzie, squinting at the memory. “I think the world is more beautiful with random scribbles and colors covering it. I used to draw on my desk in elementary school and no matter how many times I got in trouble I continued to do so.

It just made sense to mark my territory, to leave something for the person after me, like how prisoners count down their days or leave messages of hope – or otherwise – scrawled on the cell walls so people know they existed, like a beacon of ‘I survived this; so can you.’

“School was prison to me in a lot of ways, so that’s probably where it really became a theme – to draw where I wasn’t really supposed to.”

“Probably a good thing I have no talent with a spray can or I’d probably have one hell of a rap sheet. I think it’s important for artists to make a home for themselves...what better way than painting walls?” Her laugh is booming and kind of wraps around you like a hug.

That got me thinking – what are the distinctions among illicit street art, graffiti, and the street art that’s beginning to gain traction and legitimacy in [public spaces](#) and [hotels](#), not to mention high-end galleries?

Apparently that question is significant enough that the topic got its own philosophy [conference](#) at the illustrious Pratt Institute in NYC. Fascinating rabbit hole – but I digress.

Iven Jones describes his process for the piece and its concept, his voice sunny per usual. “The mural represents duality and strength,” he says. I know there’s more to the story but I don’t press – the images are powerful and suggest violence and struggle, and the triumph over something.

“This was my first time doing street art since high school. I just thought, I’ll grasp the opportunity as an artist. So I jumped in, head up. The whole project is experimental, and my execution is crazy, because I wasn’t sure what to do at all. I thought about it for a week,” he laughs. “I decided to do a 3D effect.”

I tell him it feels like the figures are alive. He says, “I like to add the highlights and shading to give the a more realistic feel, motion, and pop. The characters are from an old sketchbook. I’ve needed to use them, and I thought they’d be great for the mural.”

I ask him why here, and his answer is simpler than I expected. With his characteristic humility, he says, “I’m new to the art scene in Des Moines. I love painting. I love everything about art, so painting at the Barnum Factory is a good experience, a great way to get my name out – and hopefully open the door for

other artists like me. I just want the viewer to enjoy it, as much as I enjoy painting it.”

They both seem to derive joy from the process, the execution, the bringing to life. The final 2nd-floor immersive mural will include three additional artists, all overlapping and intermingling their styles, collaborating on the journey to completion.

It’s the kind of symbiotic creative collusion Barnum and I envisioned when we set out on this crazy journey at The Barnum Factory, all the way down to the worker identity – Cazzie worked at The Dollar Tree by day and cares for her son, who just survived a three-year cancer battle. She now provides labor at The Factory and after a full day, works on her craft.

Iven worked for Casey’s General Store and has to pick up rides to The Factory to work on the piece. They come to create against significant odds, but they always arrive excited, with fresh passion to devote to the work.

In many ways, The Factory has been built on immersive experiences – installations like Wild Beasts were experiential, and even The Slaughterhouse is a theatrical, interactive horror show, an installation of its own.

I can’t wait to see what our makers will do next, and I’d love to see more immersive art in our future, maybe even building toward [inviting viewers in](#) to watch the work come alive, or infusing the exhibits with [light and sound](#), or with [live performative presence](#).

Life at The Barnum Factory continues to expand my understanding and appreciation of the plethora of creative possibilities our makers bring. You can experience The Factory’s immersive [mural unveiling](#) on June 22, as part of [Art Week DSM](#).

I can’t wait to watch viewers as they move through all that’s coming to life up in here. As ever, thanks for coming along for the journey.

Peace,
Breanne