

## John Kowalczyk's Mural: Her Hands Move Mountains

At first glance, John Kowalczyk's mural might strike you with its vibrant color and bold composition, but its meaning runs deeper than what initially meets the eye. Titled "Her Hands Move Mountains," the piece pays tribute to Georgia O'Keeffe not only through its visual references but also by honoring her strength, determination, and ability to reshape the art world.

The hands in the mural are O'Keeffe's own - drawn from a famous photograph by her partner, Alfred Stieglitz—and set against a dreamy southwest-inspired landscape, a nod to the mountains she painted and the mountains she moved.

### Channeling Georgia's Spirit

"My mural design is inspired by Georgia's southwest landscape paintings and her hands, which were photographed by her partner Alfred Stieglitz," John explains.

"The title is both literal and metaphorical. Her hands moved paint across canvases, but she also moved metaphorical mountains to carve out space for herself as a woman artist in a male-dominated world."

By focusing on O'Keeffe's hands, John celebrates the power of making: the tools of the artist that leave lasting marks.

### A Lifelong Passion for Paint

John has been painting since the age of eight and never really stopped. His early lessons at a neighbor's house lit the spark, and his path has been supported by a network of parents, teachers, and mentors.

"I always knew I was an artist," he says. "It truly means the world to me to be able to express myself and share my art. Without their support, I'm not sure I would have made it this far."

His style? Cosmic. Colorful. Curated.

John is known for mixed media pieces that blend bold patterns, rich textures, and layered storytelling. His work often explores ecological processes and transformation through community-based art.

### Sharing the Process

For John, public art is more than a finished product. It is a conversation. While painting in Sun Prairie, he loved engaging with residents, especially young artists.

"It is great chatting with everyone who passes by," he says. "It really fuels me to paint the best mural possible. I also love explaining the process to kids and young artists to hopefully inspire them to keep creating."

### Advice for Emerging Artists

John's advice is hands-on and heartfelt: "Make lots of paintings. Meet lots of artists. Volunteer to help others on their murals to learn how to paint yours."

He believes in learning through doing and surrounding yourself with a community that supports growth.

## A Moment for Georgia

If Georgia O'Keeffe could see his mural, John imagines the moment with excitement and humility.

"OMG I would die if Georgia walked past my mural," he says. "I would want her to smile and think, 'I painted those mountains better, but he did a pretty good job on my hands.'"

It is that mix of reverence and playfulness that defines John's work.

## A Hidden Detail for the Art Nerds

Look closely at the hands in the mural. The reference photo is not random: it is an iconic photograph of O'Keeffe's hands taken by Alfred Stieglitz.

"It's the art history nerd in me that loves this," John admits.

It is a subtle nod that connects past and present, painter and muse, artist and viewer.

## A Mural Soundtrack

While painting, John listened to Hurray for the Riff Raff and Waxahatchee.

"I think Georgia would approve," he says with a grin.

## Final Reflection

John Kowalczyk's mural adds depth and meaning to Sun Prairie's Mural Fest. By spotlighting O'Keeffe's hands, he invites viewers to consider the physical and metaphorical work it takes to make something lasting.

So, when you find yourself in front of this mural, pause. Look at the hands. Think about the brushstrokes they made and the barriers they broke. And maybe let it inspire you to move your own mountain.