

Art Force 5 to attend NAACP Convention, build tribute to 1917 Silent Parade

7/19/17



Alfred University's team of art activists, Art Force 5, has been invited to this year's NAACP Convention to build an interactive tribute to the Silent Parade, a revolutionary NYC protest march that occurred July 28, 1917. The annual convention is being held July 22-26 at the Baltimore Convention Center. Attendees of the event will be invited to paint one simple tile to be inserted into large-scale mosaic portraits.

The vibrant mosaics will feature leaders of the march including Madam C.J. Walker, W.E.B. DuBois, and James Weldon Johnson. Each mosaic also serves to educate through short conversations as participants replicate a predetermined pattern onto a ceramic tile. The painted tiles are then mounted into specific squares on mobile mosaic boards creating colorful portraits. The Art Force 5 team plans to deliver five finished pieces to a yet-determined NYC location for the actual hundredth anniversary.

The Silent Parade was organized by the NAACP as a direct response to a horrific race riot in East St. Louis on July 2, 1917 as well as continuous reports of lynching across the country. The Silent Parade was the first massive African-American protest in U.S. history, with over 8,000 people dressed in white marching down NYC's Fifth Avenue. The parade was led by children, followed by women, and finally men. Participants held signs imploring then-President Woodrow Wilson to respond to the hate crimes and violence.

Established in 2006 at Alfred University, the Art Force 5 program combines social justice with an art therapy approach. In addition to providing non-violence workshops to over one hundred audiences, they specialize in creating community-built art. They have previously partnered with the University of Notre Dame, University of Oklahoma, and the College at Brockport in designing and leading projects which currently reside on those campuses. In 2016, the Art Force 5 won the Unite Rochester Challenge, a grant to help the city address critical issues such as racism and poverty. The team spent the 2016 summer partnering with city police and local youth centers to create a series of projects to engage the community in critical conversations. Additional Silent Parade mosaics have been built at State University of New York (SUNY) colleges including Purchase, Potsdam, Delhi, Canton, and ESF.

"In the face of adversity, both today and one hundred years ago, people seek a physical way to respond to conflict," says Dan Napolitano, Alfred University's Chief Diversity Officer and founder of an Art Force 5 program which has trained nearly two hundred members. "Our intent is to inspire productive outlets while building a generation of creative problem-solvers."

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