

LPAC and University of Wyoming printmaking professor Mark Ritchie partnered to bring printmaking students' work into the public realm. With permission from Laramie Main Street Alliance, a collaborative artwork unfolded on the Wyo Theater.

Working together during uncertain times, the students explore what it means to **create for and as a community.**

TRUST THE *process*

When Professor Mark Ritchie gave the assignment to build a collaborative mural, students in his intermediate and advanced printmaking class weren't quite sure where to begin. The fourteen students divided into three groups, each group expected to respond to the others, overlapping, covering, and adding as the mural evolved. Group representatives, Leslie Podjun, Em Whipple, and Drew Yerkovich, spoke with LPAC about creating in the community and growing together as a class.



After the three groups completed six different cycles of prints, the mural finished with a black and yellow motif spelling out *United We Stand, Divided We Fall*. “These are conversations that have been happening since the United States was founded,” said Yerkovich. “But it is also so time based in 2020.”

The mural will begin to peel off of the theater soon, as the prints were adhered by the temporary method of wheat pasting, but the message will linger longer. So will the students' appreciation for working together, united, on a large-scale work.

“At the start, we didn't know how we were going to get together and make a cohesive piece for the public,” said Podjun. Whipple described the process as “chaos, but really wonderful.”

Ultimately, the students learned about each other and to trust the process. “We came together,” said Yerkovich. “Maybe not everyone in our class agreed, but we came to understand each individual, communicated, and developed this work.”

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Alex Box, Jessica Brennan, DJ Caliguire, John Deines, Bree Drew, Demi Dusenberry, Isabel Leininger, Hannah McClennen, Anna Naig, Leslie Parks, Leslie Podjun, Em Whipple, Maddie Williams, and Drew Yerkovich

See the mural versions: laramiepublicart.org/projects



The blank canvas at the Wyo Theater gave the students plenty to ponder. History of the theater influenced some of the design elements, but the class knew that this was an opportunity to broadcast a contemporary and important message. “We wanted to use the opportunity and privilege to speak to something bigger than ourselves,” said Yerkovich.

The imagery that took over the theater facade throughout September featured calls for justice, passages from the Constitution, and solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Whipple noted their group gravitated towards familiar language like “We The People” and “Liberty and Justice for All” to add shared perspective. “Public art can be a uniting force,” Whipple said. “We have so much bias in our lives as individuals, as soon as someone feels like they are being attacked they automatically shut down. It is good to communicate with people and show that there are different perspectives other than your own.”

Podjun agreed. “The mural is shocking, but it is welcoming the viewer to speak and to have their own thoughts. Our generation is becoming kinder.”