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TOP STORY

## Art project honors Bosnian War's victims, survivors

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) Mar 2, 2018



Bosnian artists Muhamed Beslagic (left) and Anel Lepic work on a mural Thursday, March 1, 2018, at the Kentucky Museum. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Bac Totrong/Daily News

When Western Kentucky University junior McKayla Cash remembers high school, the history of the 1990s Bosnian War and the 100,000 people killed is starkly absent.

Cash worked with Bosnian artists this week to carve the faces of those touched by the war into walls at the Kentucky Museum's courtyard. For Cash, an art education major from Campbellsville, it was a moving experience.

"It just felt nice to be a part of something so big," she said Thursday.

Throughout the week, artists with the HAD Collective led workshops to chisel and drill human portraits into two semi-permanent walls.

On Thursday, HAD Collective artists Anel Lepic and Muhamed Beslogic drilled and chiseled lines onto a weathered Bosnian face.

"Our goal is to show what's happening in our part of the world," said Lepic, who sees art as both a vehicle for self-expression and connection with others.

Back home in Visoko, Bosnia, the group is known for transforming abandoned factory spaces into memorials for war victims and the families they left behind.

Lepic said the group completed its first project on a whim with the goal of turning an abandoned place into a sketchbook. He said the ruined and bullet-riddled walls of his country helped inform the group's technique.

At first, Lepic said the artists were seen as vandals. However, that perception changed for the better as more people began to understand their work, he said.

The people who appear in the group's portraits are everyday citizens of Bosnia. The artists take them from their surroundings and "give them a chance to live forever in some other perspective," he said.

"They're beautiful," Cash said of the carvings.

Emmalee Tomlin, a freshman from Bowling Green, agreed.

“I think it’s gorgeous,” she said, appreciating the destructive and creative aspects of the sculpting process.

WKU art professor Mike Nichols built the two walls with cinder blocks that he covered with plaster.



Nichols said he appreciates the inclusiveness of the art project.

“It seems about community in a lot of ways,” he said.

Ilhana Babic, the group’s videographer and photographer, said the goal is to spotlight everyday people who’ve been forgotten.

“The subject is pretty universal. We all have that feeling of abandonment and fear,” she said.

Babic encouraged others to follow their creative impulses.

“They just did it,” she said of the artists. “That’s when you’re free of everything.”

# Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.