

The Silent Army keeping New Bedford creative; Exploring arts and culture in times of COVID-19

Written by Steven Froias, contributing writer.

Almost 10 years ago, an image of Jesus appeared on the wall of a building just north of Lunds Corner in the North End.

It was the artwork of Mark “Maki” Carvalho – and it caused a sensation at the time.

This past Easter 2020, appropriately enough, Jesus re-appeared.

In a mask.

“Because His arms are out-stretched about six feet, I felt it said something about what we were going through with social distancing,” says Carvalho – most commonly known simply as Maki, and also Boston Maki though he is all New Bedford through and through.

Though he is an educator by day-time profession, Maki is best known as a street artist. As such, his work is found throughout the City of New Bedford, reflected in colorful images of persons as diverse as Tom Brady, Gregory Peck as Captain Ahab, and Neptune. (See and buy his work at BostonMaki.com.)

So it’s no surprise that even during a pandemic shutdown, the artist would steal surreptitiously into the night and continue to ply his trade throughout the city.

But what may come as more of a surprise is – even as stay-at-

home orders kept the vast majority of residents indoors and most businesses locked up tight – Maki received and executed a commission.

He explains that owner Adam Katz of the soon-to-be-opened Play Arcade engaged him to create a series of murals for the new space, which will be a bar and retro arcade in the former Slainte Irish Pub on lower Union Street.

After conducting online classes during the day, Maki went to work in the space at night and first stenciled then painted wall after colorful wall of familiar superheroes to enhance the vintage appeal of the enterprise.

For the artist, it not only represented a commission, but also a chance to mix things up. He says he adopted an entirely new painting technique using stencils that he first created in his studio at Kilburn Mill at Clarks Cove in the south end. Later, they were applied directly to the wall of the imminent retro arcade.

“It was fun to work in a new way,” he says, and the work was a great diversion from pandemic problems. “Things will get back to normal – and it’s great that Adam’s forging ahead with this project and taking advantage of the time to get it ready for its eventual opening.” (Watch for it via PlayArcadeNB.com).

At his home base in Kilburn Mill, things are also moving forward. A huge and diverse building that’s been an exciting center of creative innovation for the past few years, not only Maki but many other artists, small businesses and special event spaces are in residence right by gorgeous Clark’s Cove at 127 W. Rodney French Boulevard.

Though Maki says it was quiet during the mandatory shutdown, things were still happening beneath the surface in preparation for reopening.

In fact, Peter Andrade, one of the managers at Kilburn Mill at

Clarks Cove, says the building even welcomed a new artist into a studio space during the shutdown. And, the monumental renovation of the half-million square foot building continued, with essential construction still allowed under state guidelines.

The public can experience this work first-hand as the long-planned first-floor cafe and eatery, DōCo (doughconb.com) has recently opened its doors. During the shutdown, the eatery was building a fan-base for its amazing baked goods by participating in the New Bedford Farmers Market (see offerings at CoastalFoodshed.org).

“Executive Chef Alia Asher is a visual artist herself,” Andrade says. “You eat with your eyes first – and she understands how to create an attractive plate.”

Hailing from Kingston, Jamaica, Chef Asher grew up on her family’s farm and completed her formal culinary training at Johnson & Wales University in North Miami Florida, with stints at some of Ft. Lauderdale’s high end restaurants. Her passion for food and cooking things that excite and satisfy her soul brought her to New England.

“She was not originally trained as a pastry chef or baker, but her talent and creativity has allowed her to develop and play with these skills as we prepared to open Dough Company at Kilburn Mill,” says co-owner Jillian Cotter. “One of our most popular items, the Muffnut – a half donut, half muffin top baked good – was something that she completely came up with on her own, and the idea has really taken off.”

Kilburn Mill at Clarks Cove catapulted to fame when it hosted the New Bedford Whaling Museum’s restoration of “Grand Panorama of a Whaling Voyage ‘Round The World” during the summer of 2018.

Since that signature event, it’s been on a renovation winning streak adding a luscious outdoor courtyard and stunning

rooftop deck overlooking Clarks Cove and the city's Hurricane Barrier and West Municipal Beach.

Under new ownership for the past several years, it's kept long-term tenants like the Judith Klein Art Gallery & Studio, many individual artist studios, and its famed Antiques Center, while also building for the future.

That future will still arrive, post-pandemic, and Kilburn Mill, its tenants and artists like Maki and Chef Asher are even now quietly helping to usher it in...venturing stealthily out and about as a silent army battling back to the future.

As Peter Andrade says, "This, too, shall pass..."

But #NBCreative is being built to last.

About New Bedford Creative

The New Bedford Creative Consortium is the leadership group whose purpose is overseeing the execution of the citywide strategic Arts and Culture Plan entitled New Bedford Creative: our art, our culture, our future. The Arts and Culture Plan is a huge step forward in building a thriving creative ecosystem in our city, and these are the people dedicated to implementing it. This volunteer group is facilitated by the Creative Strategist, meets quarterly and is divided into three Squads: Public Art + Facilities, Placemaking + Community, and Fundraising + Distribution.