

Plein Date: local artist meets nonprofit executive director, initiating a new partnership

Sunshine glistens off of bike helmets, the Liberty Memorial and carefree smiles Sunday morning just moments before the third leg of the Tour de Hope bike race. Tour de Hope is an organization that supports local charities through a fun cycling event. However, on this particular patch of grass, in this particular moment, the race captured the attention of a different eye, changing the paradigm of the event slightly.

Rebecca Tombaugh, a local plein air (outdoor) KC artist was not a usual attendee of the event. She was not an avid biker, an eager fan, or a generous donor. Tombaugh was an artist looking for an aesthetically pleasing subject, and Tour de Hope was it.

It was the unusual amount of bikers positioned near the Liberty Memorial that caught her eye that Sunday. Tombaugh will admit she was not aware of the fundraiser, but as soon as she saw the crowd she knew it was a scene she wanted to recreate.

“I heard a big booming voice say we are going to start in five minutes, and I was like, that’s all I need. So I jumped out of the car and put my supplies on the ground,” Tombaugh said. “The guy started praying and I thought keep praying, so I continued painting and by the time they finished prayer I was finished.”

Pleased with her work Tombaugh stopped a tall, amiable man who was greeting all the participants. His name was Marvin Daniels, the Executive Director of The Hope Center, a local community and youth development organization. The two exchanged contact information after Tombaugh showed him her painting of the Liberty Memorial that included bikers participating in the Tour de Hope fundraiser. After their interaction, Marvin continued engaging supporters of the fundraiser and Tombaugh went home, positive that she was going to enter her painting into the Penn Valley Art Gala at the Buttonwood Art Space.

For four years Penn Valley Park Conservancy has hosted the Plein Air KC Art Festival. The conservancy looks to serve, restore and preserve Penn Valley park as a recreational and cultural resource for locals. More than 80 artists participated, spending 10 days painting and competing in the festival. Their works were then exhibited at the Buttonwood Art Space where 40% of sales went to the Conservatory.

Tombaugh’s work was no exception. In fact, her work sold on the opening night of the gala. The painting at first glance enamored the buyer, Kathy Disney, an avid supporter of Penn Valley Park.

“I saw the piece and just stopped and thought, ‘I want that,’” Disney said.

As a photographer Disney is very interested with how various artists interface their work using different mediums.

“It was such a different take on something that we drive by everyday, which is Liberty Memorial,” Disney said. “It was abstract. It was different, and the title added context.”

Disney was sold.

Forty percent of the proceeds from the painting benefit Penn Valley Park, and Tombaugh is donating 10% of her earnings to the Hope Center. Through the quaint meeting of an artist and an executive, creative wheels began to turn and a prospective partnership appears to be evolving.

“My approach to painting is a little bit different,” Tombaugh said. Most of the artists have had some form of training; I have had no training aside from a few art classes in college. I use calligraphy pens, I like florescent colors, stuff like that and I have a short attention span. I try to paint the feeling of something, rather than the representation of it.”

Tombaugh hopes to partner with The Hope Center’s students to introduce them to her “juvenile scribbles,” as someone once described them, and inspire them to create work of their own. Tombaugh enjoys the freedom and creativity in painting and looks forward to helping the kids tap into their individual artistic style.

The partnership, or plein date, is scheduled for this coming Fall. If you are interested in learning more about The Hope Center, looking for ways to get involved or just want to stay engaged with THC, [click here](#).