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Arts Council announces artist, design for new Major Taylor mural

Bicentennial Legends artwork will portray the “hopeful, courageous, determined” cycling champion

INDIANAPOLIS—Artist Shawn Michael Warren has been selected to create the mural of Marshall “Major” Taylor (1878-1932), the international cycling champion and racial justice advocate who will be honored with the first mural in the City of Indianapolis’ “Bicentennial Legends” series, the Arts Council of Indianapolis announced today.

Warren, based in Chicago, is one of 54 artists from 21 states who applied for the commission, and [one of three finalists](#) who submitted concepts. His portrait montage captures Taylor in three stages of his career—as a youth, as an adult at his competitive peak, and upon his return to racing after a two-year hiatus.

“It’s important to create some form of a narrative that not only depicts Major Taylor as a world-champion cyclist, but as a stoic, unwavering individual who faced the ugliest forms of racism,” Warren said. “I wanted those who view the mural to understand the difficult task Major Taylor took on to represent and win in a sport for a country that viewed him as an inferior person. The three portraits display Taylor as hopeful, courageous, and determined. His humanity is just as significant as his accomplishments as an athlete.”

Warren will begin painting the five-story mural later this spring on the east-facing exterior of the Barnes & Thornburg LLP building, 11 S. Meridian St. Indy-based painter Boxx the Artist will assist Warren, as part of a program to help artists learn to create large-scale civic murals. In partnership with Indiana Humanities, the Arts Council will also commission an Indiana poet to reflect on Taylor’s legacy. An outdoor dedication ceremony for the new mural and poem is planned for late summer.

“We are thrilled to announce the selection of Shawn Michael Warren’s design as we mark the next step of the Major Taylor mural, part of our Bicentennial Legends series,” said Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett. “Major Taylor was an international trailblazer, representing the best of our city as he paved the way for generations of Black Americans. We can’t wait to showcase the completed mural for our residents.”

Warren's proposal was chosen by a nine-person committee that included representatives from the Major Taylor Coalition, the Arts Council, the Bicentennial Commission, and Barnes & Thornburg LLP, along with an architect/urban designer. Public comments on the final designs were an important part of the review.

"Shawn's proposal beautifully captures Taylor's distinctive mix of athleticism and human dignity," said Julia Muney Moore, director of Public Art at the Arts Council and project manager for the Bicentennial Legends series. "The dynamic design really makes him come alive for mural viewers."

In 1899, Major Taylor, who was born and raised in Indianapolis, became the first African-American world-champion professional cyclist. He was the U.S. sprint champion in 1899 and 1900, set numerous world records, and became a role model for other athletes facing racial discrimination.

On April 20, the Center for Black Literature and Culture at Central Library will host a free online talk by Michael Kranish, author of *The World's Fastest Man: The Extraordinary Life of Cyclist Major Taylor, America's First Black Sports Hero*. Registration is available at indypl.org. Taylor will also be the subject of a 2022 exhibition, *Major Taylor: The Fastest Man Alive*, at the Indiana State Museum.

[Warren](#) earned his BFA at the American Academy of Art in Chicago and studied at the Florence Academy of Art in Florence, Italy. He uses historic themes or narratives to communicate essential human truths, and initiate uncomfortable conversations surrounding race, socio-political subjects, and culture. His most notable work, *In a Promised Land...*, brought to life the tragic history of the Greenwood district in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The district, which was known as the "Black Wall Street" for its high concentration of wealthy Black Americans, was burned to the ground in the Tulsa race massacre of 1921.

Lead funding support for the Major Taylor mural is provided by the Bicentennial Commission, Barnes & Thornburg LLP, Glick Philanthropies, and the CIBA Foundation, Inc. A GoFundMe promoted through the Major Taylor Coalition raised \$10,000 in public donations, with \$20,000 also donated by SRAM LLC, a Chicago-based global maker of bicycle components. SRAM's Indianapolis location, which develops and manufactures Zipp carbon fiber wheels, employs more than 200 people.

"The community support for the project has been tremendous," said Anthony Bridgeman, a member of the Indianapolis-based Major Taylor Coalition. "We're thrilled to be able to honor Major Taylor in such a high-profile way in his hometown."

About the Bicentennial Legends Mural Series

- Additional Bicentennial Legends murals will be installed through 2023.
- The public is invited to nominate Hoosiers who made significant contributions to Indianapolis' history and culture and who amplify the four guiding principles set by the Bicentennial Commission: history, civic pride, innovation, and legacy.
- The Arts Council invites artists to apply to create future murals, and welcomes inquiries from property owners who are interested in hosting murals on their buildings.
- More information can be found at indyarts.org/legends.

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[The Arts Council of Indianapolis](#) fosters meaningful engagement in the arts by nurturing a culture where artists and arts organizations can thrive. Read the Arts Council's Equity Statement [here](#).