

[https://www.thedailytimes.com/news/new-mural-at-foothills-mall-embraces-life-in-blount-county/article\\_8096e908-9ccd-50cb-a186-023bedae24b8.html](https://www.thedailytimes.com/news/new-mural-at-foothills-mall-embraces-life-in-blount-county/article_8096e908-9ccd-50cb-a186-023bedae24b8.html)

## New mural at Foothills Mall 'embraces' life in Blount County

By Adam Crawford [adam.crawford@thedailytimes.com](mailto:adam.crawford@thedailytimes.com)

Jul 19, 2021



Kevin Bongang paints a mural on the wall outside the AMC Theatre at Foothills Mall.

Tom Sherlin | The Daily Times

A new mural is breathing colorful life into Foothills Mall. Created by artist Kevin Bongang, it is brightening up the walls and benches in the hardscape area outside the AMC theater.

“The original thought process was to activate this area with color, to make it a space where people would want to capture meaningful moments,” Bongang said. “Just make it a space where people could feel happy.”

Bongang is a celebrated artist with murals in Nashville, Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia, among other places. At Foothills Mall, he has decorated the walls with explosive color, dynamic shapes and designs that reflect the beauty of life in Blount County.

“I really wanted the mural to speak to the surrounding location. I have the Great Smoky Mountains, there’s a walking shoe for the people who walk around this mall for exercise,” Bongang said. “I have a giraffe with a football because I know football is big around here. I’ve got an airplane, because I keep seeing a lot of airplanes flying around. It’s a little bit of everything.”

The mural also functions as a love letter to the people of Blount County, he said, explaining that one of the themes of the mural is “embrace,” inspired by the way he and his wife and collaborator have been welcomed by local residents.

“The city has embraced us so much, everybody’s been so nice,” he said. “Originally this was supposed to be something very abstract. But I felt like I wanted to speak to not only the surrounding area, but also to everybody who looked at the mural. The



way we were embraced by the city felt like a resonant message to put out there. Especially with everybody going back out into the world. We just need to embrace each other.”

The project has been in the works for more than a year. Bongang was first contacted last year by Art-in-Buildings, a design service for Time Equities Inc., the company that owns the mall.

“The whole idea is to bring good and interesting art to people, to their everyday lives,” Art-in-Buildings Director Tessa Ferreyros said.

For the Foothills Mall site, the company wanted to bring “something colorful and impactful” to the area. Bongang seemed like the perfect candidate, she said.

“We found Kevin’s work online, contacted him, and everything kind of moved forward from there,” Art-in-Buildings Associate Curator Eliana Blechman said.

---

But before work on the mural could begin, the COVID-19 pandemic put the brakes on the project.

“When COVID hit, everything got kicked back a bit,” Bongang said. “I actually did not think it was going to happen.”

One year later, the mural is now “about 80%” finished. Bongang has been working on the project for 2½ weeks, and his vision is almost complete.

“I’ve got to add a few elements and fill in some blank spots. I want to bring in some botanical elements,” he said.



Bongang hopes that once the project is finished, it will not only energize the area, but also bring a new perspective for the people who hang out there.

“This was a space where a lot of kids were coming out and taking their stress out on the walls,” Bongang said. “Hopefully I can deviate that energy from the younger generation. They don’t have to destroy. Maybe this could bring more inspiration to the youth around this area.”

---

Adam Crawford

County Government Reporter

