



KERRVILLE
TEXAS

MEET KERRVILLE'S NEW RESIDENT LUPE!



BY WANDA BLACKBURN

Proudly overlooking Louise Hays Park in downtown Kerrville, Lupe is a sculpture by the talented, visionary artist GiGi Miller. And true to the park's own history of being built by the community, small tiles made with love by local residents were incorporated into the large art piece.

Lupe is a colorful, whimsical version of a Guadalupe Bass, Texas' state fish. It is fitting that she "perches" near the banks

of the beautiful Guadalupe riverbank and immediately "hooks" her viewers' hearts and minds.

In July 2015, from a "pool" of contestants, Miller was chosen by the Kerrville Main Street Project to create a lasting symbol for the park. In her own inimitable style, Miller designed a work that brings joy to visitors of all ages. Unquestionably, children love Lupe's bright eyes and smiling face, her body covered in tiny tiles of all colors that twinkle in the sunlight.

Adults can appreciate the magnitude of work and design style that Miller poured into Lupe, ultimately giving her a distinct personality.

A plaque nearby explains citizens' involvement in the project, which then leads you to go back for a closer second look, finding tile after tile, scattered throughout the sculpture, embedded as part of Lupe's "scales". No doubt each of these handcrafted locally-made tiles has its own meaning, which will forever be a part of the Kerrville park's landscape.

About the Artist, GiGi Miller

GiGi Griffin Miller earned her art degree from the University of Texas and has lived in Austin for nearly 20 years. Her commercial studio, FrogTree Studios, is located just outside of Bee Cave. She continued to train and study with respect-

Left: Lupe, by artist GiGi Miller, "perches" near the banks of the Guadalupe riverbank, welcomes local residents and tourists to Louise Hays Park in Kerrville. Her tiny mosaic tiles twinkle in the sunlight. The new resident was installed in January 2017. Photo by Wanda Blackburn. Above: Residents of the Kerrville area added their personal touches to Lupe with their own handmade tiles, which are embedded as part of Lupe's "scales", adding to the history of Louise Hays Park, which was built by community volunteers. Photos by Wanda Blackburn.



Above: More scales added by volunteers. Left: The artist GiGi Miller added her own personal tile. Photos by Wanda Blackburn.

ed artists, and although she hasn't limited her art to a specific media, has decided to focus primarily on mosaic sculpture installations.

Regular readers of THCM will remember Gigi's colorful mosaic sculpture, nicknamed "Skittles", which smiled for the front cover of the January-March 2016 issue.

GiGi loves the earthy, free-form expression of her handmade tiles. Her trademark whimsical concrete structures are "fantastical sculptures" with which she "seeks to bring happiness and beauty to the world by creating art that is playful and feeds the imagination.

To be commissioned for the Lupe project in Kerrville was exactly in line with her dream of large-scale public parks and playgrounds, called "Playariums", which would promote interaction through the natural use of artistic play areas.

"Community involvement is another large goal of my artwork. It was very

rewarding to me to work with so many residents of the Kerrville area who added their personal touches to Lupe with their handmade tiles," GiGi related. All of her mosaic sculptures include hidden objects, creating a sort of 'I Spy' game. "So it added another dimension of personal delight for me to include the residents' tiles alongside my own tiles as I completed the work."

Almost all of the tiles GiGi uses are handmade in her studio, allowing more control over color, mixing each batch of glaze separately. "It gives a playful and organic natural vibrancy to my work," she says.

For the Lupe project, "my artistic challenge was to make the sculpture realistic enough to be recognizable as a Guadalupe bass, but make it fun and whimsical enough to satisfy my own taste and mission."

During the project, Gigi gave birth not only to Lupe, but to her third child. "Af-

ter I was selected for the project, I found out I was pregnant. It was a happy surprise, but the timing was unexpected and it made for an extra amount of difficulty with regards to completing the project. But my family and studio assistant were all great helpers (as with all my projects), and I couldn't have done it without their support!"

A New Mission to Help Others . . .

For ten years after art school, GiGi made no art, focusing instead on finding a reason for lifelong, challenging medical conditions. She returned to her art career in 2012 and within the past year was diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos hypermobile-type, a genetic connective tissue disorder which causes chronic pain, muscle weakness and sometimes crippling fatigue; postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome and Mast cell activation disorder.

GiGi didn't disclose her conditions publicly, believing that people might not want to take a chance on commissioning her work. But she attended a conference, where she met others with the "invisible illness" and was greatly inspired by Alyssa Seely's motivating speech about training for the Paralympics and winning gold. Seely, also the 2015 Paratriathlete World Champion, was diagnosed in 2010 with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, as well as numerous other severe physical issues.



Artist GiGi Miller works on her sculpture of Lupe, a colorful whimsical version of the Guadalupe Bass, Texas' official state fish. Miller, an Austin artist, works from her commercial studio FrogTree Studios, near Bee Cave. Photo courtesy GiGi Miller.

For the first time, GiGi now wants to tell her own story about bringing positivity and joy to the world through art-work, which she says is “a potent form of pain relief for me”. GiGi will also be posting her health journey to an online community, where she hopes people can recognize symptoms, feel validated and seek treatment.

“Most of all, I seek to inspire and offer hope of the ability to overcome difficulties and not be held back,” she said. “I am very aware that my sculptures are living in a public environment and I have the ability to affect someone’s well-being in a positive or negative way . . . and I choose positivity! I hope they are beloved by children and adults alike.

“An art critic might see my work as having nothing to say and being too kitschy and pretty, void of intellect. But my style, what I choose to make and how I make it are very intentional. I have made a very deliberate decision not to pursue the traditional ‘track’ with my art career, but rather to focus my efforts on bringing whimsy to the world. My goal is to delight the viewers of my art. It is a very intentional mission and it is why I have chosen to focus on happy public art.”

“A special treat has been getting to see children interact with Lupe when I visit Louise Hayes Park. It certainly reinforces my belief that Lupe is bringing joy and wonder into the world.

“I love making art! And I sincerely hope that someone who wanders upon one of my sculptures smiles, and has a little bit brighter day for their encounter.”

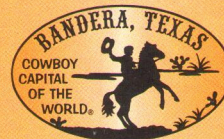
FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more about GiGi Miller, see her website: www.gigimiller.com.

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