



An outdoor sculpture for the new Muhammad Ali project "I Am The Greatest" is installed outside Lark & Sons Bar-B-Que in Benton Harbor.

Erin Stubblefield / H-P staff

A REAL KNOCKOUT

Muhammad Ali-inspired sculpture project 'I Am The Greatest' takes shape throughout Twin Cities

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
H-P Features Writer

BENTON HARBOR — Shortly after peppering the Benton Harbor landscape with his bright orange, 4½-foot-tall metal figurative sculptures for last year's "Man in the City" project, John Sauvé and his happy co-conspirator, gallery owner Anna Russo-Sieber, were already plotting their next move.



SAUVÉ

"I knew that Muhammad Ali had lived nearby, and I mentioned to her that if I did something with his image I'd want to do it here," Sauvé says by telephone from his home in Brighton, Mich. "After people really responded to 'Man in the City,' I called Anna and said, 'Why don't we go through with this?'"

The result is "I Am The Greatest," a series of 16 new Sauvé sculptures that are being installed at locations throughout Benton Harbor and St. Joseph as a way to celebrate Ali's story as a boxer, philanthropist and social activist. An opening reception for the project will be held tonight at the Anna Russo-Sieber Gallery as part of the New Territory Arts Association's Art Hop in the Benton Harbor Arts District, but Sauvé says people might be surprised by the image of Ali he chose to use for the project.

"I like him more as a person than as a boxer," Sauvé says. "So I wanted to show who he was as a whole and the difference that he made. I didn't want to have boxing gloves. I didn't want to have him raising his fists in the air. He's so iconic that sometimes people forget how he got there; how it wasn't easy."

Although the image Sauvé used as his inspiration may not be as instantly recognizable as say Ali standing over Sonny Liston, it is just as iconic.

In 1967, three years after Ali had won the World Heavyweight Championship, he refused to be conscripted into the U.S. military based on his religious beliefs and opposition to the Vietnam War. Eventually arrested and found guilty on draft evasion charges, Ali was stripped of his boxing title, and his boxing license was suspended. He was not impris-

oned, but did not fight again for nearly four years while his successful appeal worked its way up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the middle of this very public fight, Ali appeared on the April 1968 cover of Esquire magazine in a pose art director George Lois modeled after the many Renaissance paintings depicting Saint Sebastian, who was put to death circa 268 during Roman emperor Diocletian's persecution of Christians. The cover image, much like the paintings, shows Ali being pierced by six arrows with the heading "The Passion of Muhammad Ali."

"For them to use this Christian iconography as a pose for the cover photo was pretty daring," Sauvé says. "Of course Ali had to be convinced. There's an interview where the first thing he said to Lois was 'I'm a Muslim. I can't be doing this Christian image,' but Lois luckily convinced him that it was more about what he was going through and his trials and tribulations. I think it's an image that still holds up today."

Sauvé, who grew up in Detroit, says his passion for both sculpture and public art was solidified when he was hired as executive assistant to E. Ray Scott, the founder and director of the Michigan Council for Arts, and became involved with the Michigan Commission on Art in Public Places.

Since then, Sauvé's own work has been part of Art Chicago's city-wide exhibit and displayed on New York City's High Line. His 25-foot-tall piece titled "Seinsfrage" was installed last year at the William G. Milliken State Park as part of the revitalization efforts along Detroit's Riverfront, and earlier this month, his metal sculpture "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" was installed at the Margaret B. Upton Arboretum in St. Joseph as part of the Krasl Art Center's Biennial Sculpture Invitational.

Although a few final locations were still being sorted out at press time, Sauvé's Ali sculptures, which carry over the same orange painted steel motif as his "Man in the City" series, will appear at the Krasl Art Center, Box Factory for the Arts and Silver Beach Carousel in St. Joseph, and Anna Russo-Sieber Gallery, Golf Club at Harbor Shores, The

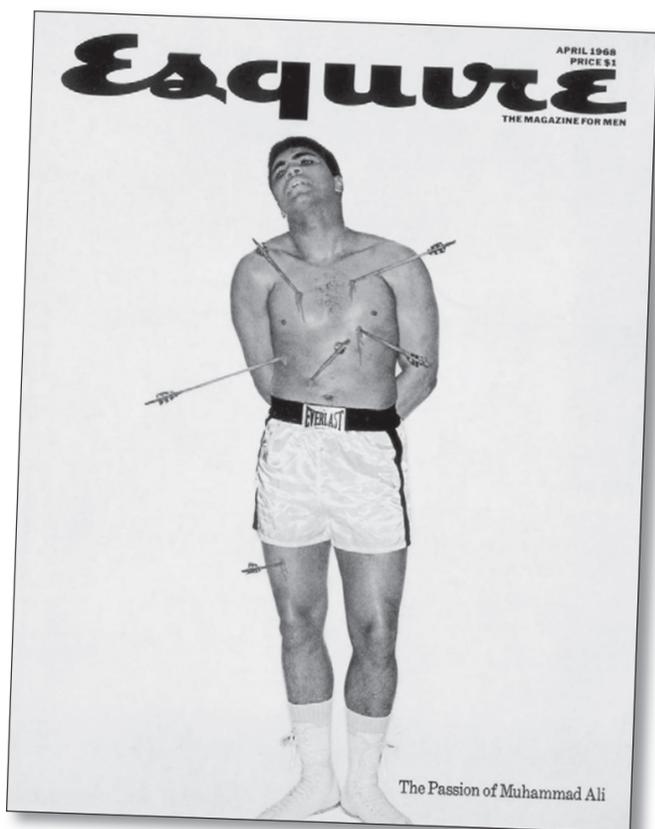


Image provided

This 1968 Esquire cover provided the inspiration for the sculptures John Sauvé created for "I Am The Greatest," which will be on display at various locations throughout the St. Joseph and Benton Harbor area.

Livery, the Boys & Girls Teen Center, The Citadel Dance & Music Center, Water Street Glassworks and Lark & Sons Bar-B-Que in Benton Harbor.

"My favorite install without a doubt is Lark's," Sauvé says. "They're just the greatest people and they loved the whole idea. It's placed where the gas pumps used to be and I think that piece looks great there."

In addition to hosting tonight's opening reception at her Benton Harbor gallery, Russo-Sieber has been using the opportunity through Sauvé's work to teach local children about public art and the impact that one individual can have on a community. The first of several planned two-week workshops was held late last month with more scheduled for August, September and beyond if she can secure the funding.

"To be able to incorporate educating children and using Muhammad Ali as the role model, it was too good not to run with it," Russo-Sieber says. "He's opened up community centers and done amazing things for people. He took his success and did something with it. He went through so much adversity against all odds. So it's a chance to show kids that they can pull through hard times and be the change. That's what it's all about."

The first workshop with 16 teens from the Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor featured discussions on Ali, public art, and overcoming adversity as well as a hands-on art project to design and paint their own 3-foot

wooden "I Am The Greatest" sculptures, which will also be on display in the gallery.

"I can not believe how the children have responded to it," Russo-Sieber says. "Having the Boys & Girls Club call me up and tell me 'You have no idea how this is affecting them' shows what art can do. I could not be more proud of this program."

"I've seen this before with other projects I've done," adds Sauvé, who has his own art foundation. "You're having them tell stories about their lives and by putting a framework around it and using art to bring out those stories, that's where things change. It's about realizing they can do anything they can put their mind to. If one kid changes their lives as a result the whole project is worth it to me."

For his part, Sauvé has agreed to keep the Ali sculptures in place "for at least two years," although a firm date beyond Oct. 1 has yet to be officially announced.

"Ali took risks and made a difference as a result of those risks," Sauvé says. "Who says we can't do the same?"

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'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel'

A group of British retirees travel to India to spend their golden years at a newly restored hotel but find the accommodations to be less than palatial. Stars Judi Dench, Bill Nighy, Dev Patel and Tom Wilkinson. Rated PG-13 for sexual content and language. Running time: 124 minutes.

'Chernobyl Diaries'

Six young tourists in search of adventure abroad hire an extreme tour guide, who takes them to a ghost town thought to have been deserted in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Stars Devin Kelley, Jonathan Sadowski and Ingrid Bolso Berdal. Rated R for violence, some bloody images and pervasive language. Running time: 88 minutes.

'Men in Black 3'

With his partner's life and the fate of the planet at stake, a special agent travels back in time to set things right. Stars Will Smith, Tommy Lee Jones, Josh Brolin and Jemaine Clement. Also in 3-D. Rated PG-13 for sci-fi action violence, and brief suggestive content. Running time: 105 minutes.

Still showing

'The Avengers'

A team of superheroes including Iron Man, Captain America, the Hulk and Thor unite to save the world. Also in Imax 3-D. Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of sci-fi violence and action throughout, and a mild drug reference. Running time: 140 minutes.

'Battleship'

Naval officers participate in a global effort to fight off invading aliens. Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of violence, action and destruction, and for language. Running time: 131 minutes.

'Dark Shadows'

In 1772, after breaking a witch's heart, an inveterate playboy is turned into a vampire and buried alive for 200 years, at which point he is inadvertently freed and emerges into a very different world. Rated PG-13 for comic horror violence, sexual content, some drug use, language and smoking. Running time: 120 minutes.

'The Dictator'

A political strongman will stop at nothing to keep democracy out of his oppressed nation. Rated R for strong crude and sexual content, brief male nudity, language and some violent images. Running time: 83 minutes.

'The Hunger Games'

In the post-apocalyptic ruins of North America, a teenage girl competes in a nationally televised battle to the death against 23 of her peers. Rated PG-13 for intense violent thematic material and disturbing images — all involving teens. Running time: 142 minutes.

'The Lucky One'

A Marine returns home from his third tour of duty in Iraq with his good-luck charm: a found photo of a woman he's never met but intends to find and thank. Rated PG-13 for some sexuality and violence. Running time: 101 minutes.

'The Pirates! Band of Misfits'

The enthusiastic captain of a pirate ship seeks to best his rivals and win the coveted Pirate of the Year award in this animated tale. Also in 3-D. Rated PG for mild action, rude humor and some language. Running time: 88 minutes.

'What to Expect When You're Expecting'

Five couples have their intertwined lives turned upside down by impending parenthood. Rated PG-13 for crude and sexual content, thematic elements and language. Running time: 110 minutes.

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• MEN IN BLACK 2D (PG13)
Fri-Sat: 11:15, 12:00, 2:00, 2:45, 4:45, 7:30, 8:15, 10:15
• CHERNOBYL DIARIES (R)
Fri-Sat: 11:00, 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, 9:50, 11:00
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• THE DICTATOR (R)
Fri-Sat: 11:05, 1:05, 3:05, 5:05, 7:05, 9:05
• BATTLESHIP (PG13)
Fri-Sat: 12:30, 1:30, 3:30, 4:30, 6:30, 7:30, 9:30, 10:30
• WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING (PG13)
Fri-Sat: 11:10, 1:50, 4:35, 7:20, 9:55
DARK SHADOWS (PG13)
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THE LUCKY ONE (PG13)
Fri-Sat: 6:05
THE HUNGER GAMES (PG13)
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Feature presentations begin 10-15 minutes after published showtimes.