

This controversial mural artist loves Indianapolis. Indy isn't sure it's mutual.

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A mural of rabbits having sex didn't survive a week ([/story/entertainment/arts/2018/10/19/beholder-indianapolis-paints-over-mural-two-rabbits-having-sex/1696056002/](#)) on the exterior of a Woodruff Place restaurant last year, but that dust-up of animal lust was only the beginning of the story of artist Jules Muck in Indianapolis.

Muck, a California-based graffiti and street art specialist known by her "Muck Rock" tag, has spent more than two weeks in Indianapolis this summer — adding murals to restaurants, record stores and residential spaces.

Property owners and casual observers routinely offer rave reviews, but members of the creative community have suggested a sense of "Muck Rock" fatigue because of the volume of work and how it may affect Indianapolis artists.

Muck receives permission from property owners wherever she paints, and she riffed on her controversial mating bunnies in several places. At Beholder, 1844 E. 10th St., the wall that originally showcased Muck's rabbits — with one smoking a cigarette — now is home to a wholesome depiction of Disney's Bambi and Thumper ([/story/entertainment/arts/2019/07/31/jules-muck-painting-new-mural-beholder-after-bunnies-backlash/1876867001/](#)). Muck affixed rabbit ears to Bambi and deer antlers to Thumper.

Muck's amorous rabbits are now seen in a smaller version inside Beholder, and a young man in Kokomo asked her to paint the same image on the hood of a car.

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Jules Muck added a depiction of caution tape to modify her signature painting of mating rabbits for a new mural on the side of Storage Space art gallery, 121 E. 34th St. (Photo: Jenna Watson/IndyStar)

Beholder owner on rabbit sex mural: 'you're welcome for the rising property values' ([/story/entertainment/2018/10/18/beholder-indianapolis-has-cartoon-mural-two-rabbits-having-sex/1680740002/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=amp&utm_campaign=speakable](#))

A bit of artist commentary on last year's uproar, in which some neighbors of Beholder labeled the image "tacky," "offensive" and unsuitable for viewing by children ([/story/entertainment/2018/10/18/beholder-indianapolis-has-cartoon-mural-two-rabbits-having-sex/1680740002/](#)), is newly installed on the side of Storage Space art gallery (<https://www.instagram.com/storagespaceindy/>), 121 E. 34th St.

Muck painted strands of caution tape to modify the two-rabbit scene.

"It's just part of a conversation that's been going on about the bunnies," Muck said. "I'm embracing the conversation. To me, it's a little funny that's the problem. We paint guns and skulls and all this craziness, and the one that's a problem is the bunnies. Without trying to annoy anyone, I'm trying to say, 'This is not actually a dangerous image.'"

Beyond what might be described as a sophomoric sight gag, Muck's rabbits convey her artistic philosophy: "Keep producing."

"The whole concept of that piece is, 'keep producing,' keep making work, keep going," Storage Space founder Brent Lehker said. "As an artist, I've discovered that the successful artists are the ones who keep doing it no matter what."

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Jules Muck and her dog, Dada, sit next to Muck's "Dolly Door" mural painted on the side of the Amelia's Bakery and Bluebeard building in Fletcher Place. (Photo: Michelle Pemberton/IndyStar)

For the moment, Muck is doing her thing in Indiana at a clip of four to eight murals each day. She's painted Dolly Parton on the side of Amelia's Bakery ([/story/entertainment/arts/2019/07/31/jules-muck-painting-new-mural-beholder-after-bunnies-backlash/1876867001/](https://www.indystar.com/story/entertainment/arts/2019/07/31/jules-muck-painting-new-mural-beholder-after-bunnies-backlash/1876867001/)), 653 Virginia Ave.; Blondie vocalist Debbie Harry on the side of Indy CD & Vinyl, 806 Broad Ripple Ave.; and Indianapolis author Marguerite Young at Tube Factory, 1125 Crift St.

"All these people in Indiana have been reaching out," Muck said of demand for her work. "I've never experienced anything like this in my life."

She lists her local patrons as scientists, bar owners, moms, young people, business owners and homeowners.

Despite the "Here to paint, gone tomorrow" motto at the top of her Instagram profile (<https://www.instagram.com/muckrock/?hl=en>), Muck has made Indianapolis the second-longest stop of her life's open-ended tour. In New Orleans, she stuck around until buying a house became a sensible decision.

"As long as it's working out, I'm going to paint wherever I am," she said. "(Indiana) seems to have the most pull right now."

She painted "Muck Loves Indy" in a thought bubble near the Storage Space rabbits, and there's plenty of evidence to say the feeling is mutual.

But the reception hasn't been 100% positive.

On social media, observers have groused about Muck Rock oversaturation and speculated that Muck is giving away art to the detriment of other artists' earning power.

High-profile rapper and DJ Rusty Redenbacher said he has no ill will toward Muck, but he theorizes walls she's painting could be devoted to Indianapolis artists instead.

"My beef was with all these local establishments rushing to be a part of the 'cool kids club' when there are so many artists that would love to be asked to do something for them," Redenbacher told IndyStar. "Considering how much these very places talk about 'supporting your locals,' when the chance came they weren't thinking about their 'locals.' "

Because so much attention is being paid to Muck's murals, the Arts Council of Indianapolis will host an artists forum 6 p.m. Aug. 19 at Storage Space gallery. The discussion will focus on how Muck works when she visits a city and possible effects on hometown creators.

Muck will attend the forum, which is not planned as a critique of her art but as a discussion of her practices. Admission is free, but a ticket is required to attend (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/artist-industry-nights-special-edition-at-storagespace-gallery-monday-august-19-tickets-69341545429>).

How Muck rocked Indianapolis

Muck first visited Indianapolis in 2018 at the request of Zodiac Vintage co-owner Jess Parrotte, who commissioned a mural on a garage door at her home. Parrotte, who also works at Bluebeard restaurant, alerted people such as Bluebeard (<https://bluebeardindy.com/>) owner Ed Battista and Beholder owner Jonathan Brooks that Muck was in town and available to make art.

Travel commitments limited Muck's time in Indianapolis to one day, but Battista was eager to connect with her when she returned this summer. Amelia's Bakery and Bluebeard occupy the same building.

"I've connected her with pretty much everybody I know that might want a mural," Battista said. "She found a very good group of people. Most of the places she's done murals are kind of an interconnected community of people who love our city."

In the case of Rabble Coffee (<http://www.rabblecoffee.com/>), 2119 E 10th St., Muck contacted owner Josie Hunckler and expressed an interest in painting at the community-focused coffee shop.

Hunckler suggested a mural of jazz singer Nina Simone because her music frequently is heard inside Rabble and because the business hosted a Simone tribute event in 2017.

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Jules Muck painted a mural of singer Nina Simone at Rabble Coffee, 2119 E 10th St. (Photo: David Lindquist/IndyStar)

Muck painted a black-and-white portrait of Simone on a brown, metallic exterior wall of Rabble, two blocks east of Beholder.

Muck's current swath of Indianapolis murals includes a David Bowie-themed cat inside Square Cat Vinyl, 1054 Virginia Ave.; tulips growing through the eye sockets of a green skull at Healer music venue, 3631 E. Raymond St.; and a headless horseman on the garage door of a home in Irvington.

"I think it's a nice mix of fun stuff, and I like the controversial stuff," Rabble owner Hunckler said. "And I really, really like our piece. I think it's perfect for our spot."

Lehker said Muck will return to Indianapolis in May to show smaller paintings during a gallery show at Storage Space.

"She works so fast," he said. "She is amazing, as far as her craft. She's pumping them out, and they're good. She's definitely a force."

Crowding out Hoosiers?

Bluebeard owner Battista said support of visiting and local artists doesn't need to be an either/or proposition.

"We can support all the artists," Battista said. "I think it's important that we have this influx of outside influence and visions that help us to better define what Indianapolis is."

Muck's ["Dolly Door" mural](#) ([/story/entertainment/arts/2019/07/31/jules-muck-painting-new-mural-beholder-after-bunnies-backlash/1876867001/](#)) shares a wall with a mural by Flatland Kitchen, the creative studio of Rebekah and Eric Nolan. Indianapolis-based Flatland Kitchen painted playful cups and spoons on the exterior of Tinker Coffee, 1125 W. 16th St., as well as interior pieces at Milktooth, 534 Virginia Ave., and Provider, 1101 E 16th St.

Battista said he's commissioned Indianapolis artists Megan Jefferson and Jamie Locke, the duo responsible for sets of wings seen along the Monon Trail, to paint a mural at his Black Market building, 922 Mass Ave.

Mass Ave. is home to two high-profile portrait murals: author Kurt Vonnegut by Pamela Bliss and poet Mari Evans by Michael "Alkemi" Jordan.

Bliss also painted Downtown murals [of Reggie Miller](#) ([/story/entertainment/arts/2018/10/19/reggie-miller-mural-indianapolis-building-done-and-its-glorious/1694876002/](#)) and Indiana Avenue jazz icons.

FAB Crew, short for Fantastic Aerosol Brothers, recently touched up one of their murals in Fountain Square for the opening of Upland Brewing Co.'s new location, and the FAB duo of Dan Thompson and Ben Long painted a street level mural for The Whit apartments on Pennsylvania Street.

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Jules Muck painted a mural of Blondie vocalist Debbie Harry at Indy CD & Vinyl, 806 Broad Ripple Ave. (Photo: David Lindquist/IndyStar)

Artist [Carl Leck](#) (<https://www.instagram.com/cbliimagery/>), whose work includes two pieces made for "46 FOR XLVI" Super Bowl mural project organized by the Arts Council of Indianapolis, doesn't agree that visiting artists are a detriment to local artists.

"I think (the idea) is laughable," Leck said. "If we want to be a world-class city, why would we be afraid of expanding our art scene to people outside of Indianapolis? I think it makes Indianapolis better. Bring it on."

In addition to Muck's informal residency, English artist Nick Walker recently painted an eight-story tall ["Love Conquers All" mural](#) ([/story/news/local/marion-county/2019/08/15/check-out-cityways-new-mural-above/2018528001/](#)) on a new CityWay building east of Bankers Life Fieldhouse. Meanwhile, New York City graffiti artist Al Diaz tagged one of his SAMO© phrases — "As a Well Known Brand in Every Town Across the Land" — on the exterior of the Dugout Bar, 621 Virginia Ave.

Artist [Samuel Vazquez](https://www.instagram.com/samuelevazquez/) (<https://www.instagram.com/samuelevazquez/>), a New York subway graffiti writer in the 1980s and one of the subjects of 2019 WFYI documentary film "Recharged: The Art of Creative Renewal," said it's not easy to make a name in your hometown.

"We tend to appreciate outsiders more than insiders," Vazquez said. "I can see it in music. I've heard stories of people who worked with Babyface. Once he left the city and started doing things, then he became Indianapolis' own."

Muck said traveling for work is necessary for mural artists: "Otherwise, we'd just blanket everything."

Similar to Leck, she doesn't buy the argument that walls should be reserved for local artists.

"I am the biggest objector to localism you'll ever meet," Muck said. "I don't think it's cool. I don't think it's peace, love and harmony. I think it's disruptive and narrow-minded."

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In praise of public art

Muck said a [Lafayette public art initiative titled "Wabash Walls"](https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2019/07/26/wabash-avenues-mural-makeover-continues-street-artists-descend-wabash-walls-2/1825652001/) (<https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2019/07/26/wabash-avenues-mural-makeover-continues-street-artists-descend-wabash-walls-2/1825652001/>) brought her back to Indiana in July.

She said her "Wabash Walls" payday gave her flexibility to work in Indianapolis for a variety of ways of being compensated.

"I always try to look for at least one mainstay to cover our expenses," she said.

In addition to conventional commissions in Indianapolis, Muck mentioned generous meals at local restaurants. Battista said Muck stayed at Bluebeard's traveling artist apartment, and Storage Space's Lehker said he gave Muck paint as payment for his mural.

Vazquez, an Indianapolis resident since 1991 who's planning to move back to New York to work in that city's arts scene, said mural work can be a challenge here.

"It all comes down to economics," he said. "Who's going to hire me to do it? Is there the amount of resources to accomplish something like that?"

Graffiti letter forms on trains have given way to accessible street art identified with artists such as Banksy. Vazquez describes murals as "one of the leading visual expressions."

"Before, you would look at it and think, 'Uh oh, don't walk in that area,'" he said. "Now when you see murals, it's like, 'Oh let me go over there and check it out!'"

Battista said he welcomes any discussion of an increased amount of public art.

"It's so inspiring when you go to a place like Detroit or Denver, cities that have areas that are completely painted and are beautiful," he said, specifically noting Denver's [River North Art District \(RiNo\)](https://www.denver.org/things-to-do/denver-arts-culture/street-art/) (<https://www.denver.org/things-to-do/denver-arts-culture/street-art/>).

Muck said there's never a shortage of walls to paint.

"Honestly, the more murals people see, the more murals people want," Muck said. "(Indianapolis) artists are probably going to be pulled more to do work just because of the work that's up. Most people don't think about putting a mural on a wall until they've already seen something like that happen."

Street art forum

>> **FEATURING:** Jules Muck and FAB Crew artist Dan Thompson.

>> **WHEN:** 6 to 8 p.m. Aug. 19.

>> **WHERE:** Storage Space art gallery, 121 E. 34th St.

>> **ADMISSION:** Free, but a ticket is required to attend. Live video of the event will stream at the [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/indyarts) (<https://www.facebook.com/indyarts>) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/arts council lindy/) (<https://www.instagram.com/arts council lindy/>) profiles of the Arts Council of Indianapolis.

>> **INFO:** Reserve a ticket for "Artist Industry Nights: Special Edition" at [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/artist-industry-nights-special-edition-at-storagespace-gallery-monday-august-19-tickets-69341545429) (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/artist-industry-nights-special-edition-at-storagespace-gallery-monday-august-19-tickets-69341545429>).

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