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The art of coping with 9/11

After 9/11, local residents channeled their mixed-up emotions into paintings, songs and sculpture

By Karen Lindell
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"Lady Liberty," a painting by Oak Park artist Julinya Vidigal De Vince and her son, was painted as a response to the defining media images of 9/11.

Everyone felt every which way but OK after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, cycling through all degrees of the basic "mad" and "sad."

And everyone found a way to cope, or not.

People screamed, whispered, cried out, curled inward, fled, halted, gave blood, took stock of their lives.

And artists created.

Read on to learn how seven local residents – two painters, two sculptors, a digital artist, a songwriter and a poet-artist – channeled their particular variation of mad, sad and overall helplessness after 9/11 into creativity.



Oak Park artist Julinya Vidigal De Vince painted "Taliban" after 9/11 when she saw media images of women from Afghanistan in their full-body garments called burqas.

'PAINT WHAT YOU FEEL' Julinya Vidigal De Vince

Oak Park artist and art teacher Julinya Vidigal De Vince said she's always told her young students, "You've got to paint what you feel."

After 9/11, she painted the images that kept cropping up again and again in the media and were singled into our individual and collective psyches: quivering flags, dust-covered faces, the grate-like remnants of the Twin Towers, onlookers gazing upward, muddled dark skies. "And Our Flag Was Still There" depicted ground zero. "Lady Liberty"

showed the Statue of Liberty, a ball of smoke in the skyline behind her. Both started as abstract paintings by her adult son, Victor Vidigal De Avila, that she then painted over.

But the one that has resonated most with viewers, to her surprise, is "Taliban."

"When we started hearing about the Taliban after 9/11," she said, "I kept seeing images of these women running, with colorful hoods covering their faces. It's so awful what happened to women in Afghanistan, but there was something beautiful about them, and the colors." In the painting, she said, "it's like you can only see their feet, like they are flying."

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