

News @ Northeastern wrote an article about the commission:

<https://news.northeastern.edu/2020/08/04/inspired-by-her-mothers-battle-with-cancer-she-paints-a-mural-in-boston-city-hall/>



In an otherwise nondescript hallway, [Sophia Ainslie's](#) recently finished mural on the eighth floor of Boston City Hall brings a sense of vibrancy as splashes of blue, pink, yellow, orange, and red collide with the flurry of black lines that give her artwork shape.

Throughout the 90 hours Ainslie spent on the installation, passersby who worked in the building often stopped and stared. They'd ask her what the painting depicts.

"What do you think it is?," Ainslie, associate teaching professor of art and design at Northeastern, would respond.

People said they saw all kinds of things: animals, manifestations of emotions such as happiness; someone even saw a map of the world. Ainslie says she welcomed the variation of responses.





A mural in Boston's city hall created by Sophia Ainslie, an associate teaching professor in the College of Art, Media and Design at Northeastern. Photos by Ruby Wallau/Northeastern University

“Art sparks our imaginations, and allows us to dream for a moment,” Ainslie says. “I hope my work tickles the imagination—that each time you look at it, you see something new.”

Ainslie’s style fuses landscape painting with diagnostic imaging, such as that of CT or MRI scans. And the one in Boston City Hall, like many of her other murals, was inspired by one image in particular—the X-ray image that was taken of her mother’s abdomen during her fight against cancer.

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When Ainslie first saw the image 11 years ago, she recalls being struck by the similarities between the image on the X-ray and the shapes created in art—the patterns, lines, and contrast between light and dark—and that compelled her to create a work of art from it.

“I mentioned to her at this difficult time, when we were trying to figure out what the next steps would be, that I was going to do a portrait of her from the inside,” says Ainslie, who has been a working artist in the Boston area since 2003. “She laughed. She was very familiar with the manner in which artists see opportunity in everything.”



Anna Eugene and Alexander Langrock, two of Ainslie's former students, work on the mural with Ainslie on the eighth floor of Boston City Hall. Photos courtesy of Sophia Ainslie

Ainslie says the mural in Boston City Hall is the continuation of her mourning of her mother, and a way to “hold onto her memory.”

Before Ainslie applied her first stroke of the brush, she spent three weeks creating the piece on her laptop, transforming the various shapes from the X-ray image to create variation between this and her past works. With the help of two Northeastern students, she mapped out the design onto the large wall in pencil before adding paint and black lines. All in all, the process took a month, she says.

The 20-foot-tall mural stands down the hall from the [Boston Office of Arts and Culture](#). Ainslie says she was thrilled to work on this project because of the effect that public art can have on people, especially during challenging times.

“Public art has enormous power,” Ainslie says. “People who don’t always have the time or inclination to go to a gallery or a museum can have access to it. It lifts our spirits, and it gives us hope.”

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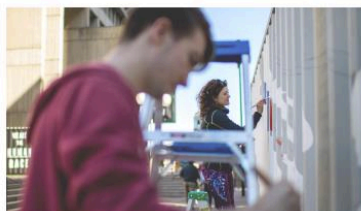
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