

'Watermark' offers artistic reminder for Millvale

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A thin blue line passes through Millvale's business district, extending from Kvertrout Park under the 40th Street Bridge to Grant Avenue's Pocket Park. It travels in swirled and jagged ribbons along sidewalks, brick facades and storefront windows.

In 2017, artist Ann Tarantino completed the "Watermark" public art installation to illustrate the community's relationship with water.

Neighborhood Allies and the Office of Public Art's Temporary Public Art and Placemaking Pilot Program commissioned "Watermark," in collaboration with the Millvale Community Development Corp., Millvale Community Library and The Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka.

The Neighborhood Allies website states that the program "serves to reduce the challenges of blight, harness creative cultural potential and help re-energize and reshape how residents imagine their neighborhoods."

Tarantino, who teaches at the Penn State University School of Visual Arts, quickly discovered when meeting with the Millvale collaborators that they were interested in the art depicting water.

The installation consists of two components: the painted line and an audio-visual installation discernible when night falls at GAP Park.

"In the video, water textures are projected across the park, flickering in and out of view, while a soundtrack of water sounds plays in the background," Tarantino, of State College, said.

Two of Tarantino's former students assisted with the project. They used thick stencils, a paint sprayer and paint that will mostly dissolve by summer 2019. She said she chose a blue shade that didn't closely resemble the color used to delineate parking spaces but "would make a visual reference to water."

For the shape of the line, she found inspiration by viewing maps of water rippling across landscapes. She transformed the lines into the geometric forms that she considered more appealing for the large urban canvas.

She characterized the final result as "improvisational" — for example, if a street was rough in a spot or a curb existed, she would avoid painting near it. The goal was to make the overall art appear cohesive.

For the night display, Tarantino partnered with Ben Peoples of Ben Peoples Industries to install speakers and "gobo" light fixtures in the park.

Millvale will host "Watermark": A Clean Water Fair slated for noon to 5 p.m. Sept. 15, to celebrate the borough's masterpiece and raise awareness regarding the region's water issues. The event will occur along Grant Street, which will remain closed for Millvale Days.

The fair will feature information and activities from the Gardens of Millvale, Millvale EcoDistrict, University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Museum of Natural History and Girty's Run Watershed Association.

"We want to be a part of a community effort in promoting clean water, as it's key to a clean environment," said Chris Kubiak, Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania education director, who will attend the fair. "As we know, water is essential for life, so clean water benefits both birds and people in Western Pa."

Tara Walker, Millvale Community Development Corp. board member, hopes the fair emboldens future generations.

"Goals for the event include: to raise awareness about clean water issues in our region, to provide access and information for residents about local organizations who play a role in providing clean water to residents in our region, to provide access to much-needed resources in a community that is struggling with its relationship to water, and to celebrate the culmination of 'Watermark.'"

The Heinz Endowments and the Hillman Foundation supported "Watermark." To view a project video, visit neighborhoodallies.com/community-news/now-millvale-top-watermark.

Eric Cebzanov is a Tribune-Review contributor.