

# 'Soul painting' aims to bring cultures together



Iranian-born artist Reza Nassrollahi and Greenwood's Mary Lyle Cathcart sit on a painting canvas and focus on each other before Nassrollahi paints at Main and Maxwell Friday night.

By ST. CLAIRE DONAGHY  
sdonaghy@indexjournal.com

Uptown Greenwood retail and gallery shop Main and Maxwell drew art fans and curious onlookers Friday with a reception and painting demonstration by international artist Reza Nassrollahi.

He unrolled a large canvas on the floor of the gallery and had a volunteer — Greenwood's Mary Lyle Cathcart — seat herself on it and then lie on her back and close her eyes. He created a "soul painting" around her body.

Nassrollahi said he initiated this large-scale art project about 18 months ago, in Germany and Nepal, and it will take years to complete. Future exhibitions could be in the works.

Before beginning Friday's soul painting, Nassrollahi told Cathcart, "We relax. We meditate."

With hands clasped, facing each other in seated yoga poses and meditative music playing over a speaker, artist and subject focused on each other. Nassrollahi removed See **PAINTING**, page 4A



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Soul painting volunteer Mary Lyle Cathcart is helped from the canvas on the floor at Main and Maxwell by artist Reza Nassrollahi, who did a live painting demonstration related to his global art project, 1001Soul.

# PAINTING

From page 1A

strands of beads from his wrists and placed beads on the canvas.

Then, Cathcart relaxed on the canvas, stretching out on her back.

Nassrollahi donned disposable gloves and began squeezing white acrylic paint from a tube, spreading it on the canvas around Cathcart, using his hands. Next, a dark gray paint was applied, followed by yellow, orange, green, purple, turquoise and pink.

He used his hands to blend colors and create shapes — trees, a bird and a woman in a tree.

“All of us have to let go,” Nassrollahi told the audience. “Everything has to move.”

Cathcart said the experience is surreal.

“I just tried to close my eyes and listen to the music,” Cathcart said. “Eventually, it just felt like nobody was here. I could not see what he was doing, but I knew he was painting with purple at the bottom of the canvas, and he really was.”

“It’s really interesting. I got into my happy place, which is weird. I love the mountains and the forests, and I have worked at a summer camp. That’s kind of really where my head went. The fact that he had trees and birds and a woman sitting in a tree was really, really weird. It’s



BY ST. CLAIRE DONAGHY/SDONAGHY@INDEXJOURNAL.COM

Artist Reza Nassrollahi uses his hands to blend and apply paint from tubes to a canvas as soul painting volunteer Mary Lyle Cathcart lies on the canvas on the floor of Main and Maxwell. One of Nassrollahi’s abstract paintings is displayed in the background.

among the coolest things I’ve ever done.”

To complete 1001Soul, Nassrollahi is striving to paint 1001 of these soul paintings. He aims to eventually have one collective canvas of each of the images, visible from a gigantic screen through aerial photographs and live cameras.

Nassrollahi, born and raised in Tehran, Iran in 1975, moved to Germany with his family in 1989, when he was 14. Conflict in his home country prompted the move.

The self-taught visual artist completed training as a hairstylist, make-up artist, and is active in various areas of the fashion and TV industries. He is also a nephew of Greenwood businessman Sammy Nassrollahi of Rugs of Distinction and HydroOne beverages.

For 1001Soul, Reza Nassrollahi is working with Nic Leon-

hardt, a German theater, art and media scholar and writer, on this “artistic peace pact” that seeks to bridge people, countries, cultures and religions.

Pictures from 1001Soul will be auctioned and sold at the end of the project, and book projects are also in the works by Leonhardt to accompany the art and help tell the story. She said the gigantic screen part of the project could potentially be in a desert, maybe in Nevada.

All proceeds, Nassrollahi said, will support needy children and social and environmental initiatives in places visited. To find out more, visit: [1001soul.world](http://1001soul.world) or email [soul@1001soul.com](mailto:soul@1001soul.com).

1001Soul is not about breaking a world record for a large painting, Nassrollahi said, but rather is about uniting people.

“I’m trying to connect peo-

ple through art,” Nassrollahi said. “Right now, we are so separate but we are one people. These paintings are capturing the soul of the earth. Each one is unique, but, when put together, they will take on a new shape and inspire conversations about what we will do with the time we have.”

Leonhardt said the project is a way for people to have a platform for voicing all of their concerns.

“Everyone is worried about the world right now,” Leonhardt said. “Every piece counts in bringing us together. Reza and I met through art. I liked his painting and he liked my writing. We met in a gallery in Munich, Germany.”

Friends Tina Biemann and Patrician Peña of Greenwood said they popped in Main and Maxwell on Friday after checking out another art event at the Arts Center of Greenwood earlier that evening.

“I’m blown away by this,” Biemann said. “I’ve grown up in Greenwood and I’ve never been in this scene. Patricia moves here and she brings me to all sorts of things. When he first started painting, I was seeing angel wings, but I don’t know if anybody else did. Depending on the angle and what you were looking at, you would see other things. It just amazed me.”

Contact St. Claire Donaghy at 864-943-2518