

Creating Together

Wild Medicine:

THE ECO MURAL PROJECT

BY KALA HAGOPIAN, HAGOPIAN ARTS

Through her public arts initiative, mural artist Kala Hagopian fosters an appreciation for art and environmental consciousness within her community. We hope this story inspires you to seek out your own creative community of like-minded souls..

"A jewel peeps up from a pattern — translucent skin as fragile as life; as delicate as balance. An amphibian tells us without words, 'Heaven is anywhere one lets it stay.'"

And then there's us — of concrete and metal, plastic and wires — ambitiously tinkering, rambunctiously conquering, thumping our chests in dominant delusion, while this little jewel reminds us, 'We are one organism peeping through many eyes. What you do unto me, you have done to yourself.'"
— Philip Hagopian, my father

From the fields, forests, rivers, and wetlands of rural Vermont, my childhood was shaped by immersive exploration and days spent painting with my father. He taught me to live authentically — with presence, creativity, and deep connection — even when our humble circumstances might have looked like poverty to others. The wealth of love, connection, and mentorship I experienced was priceless. Those simplest, most present moments — absorbing the natural wonders of what is real — imprinted on my soul and laid the foundation for Hagopian Arts. I hope to pass this gift of creative wonder and connection on to my son.

Rooted in imagery inspired by nature, in 2016 I independently founded Hagopian Arts, my female-owned public art initiative based in West Philadelphia. I've always painted with a fine art aesthetic to create luminous murals that juxtapose highly rendered realism with vibrant geometric patterns and atmospheric elements.

In those early years, I balanced brushwork with bedtime stories and painted long hours, often with my infant and then toddler son perched on my back. In 2018, I channeled my immersive upbringing into the Eco Mural Project, knowing I needed self-driven work to align authenticity with my mural initiative. In this effort, I gifted more than \$75,000 in hand-painted Eco Murals to the West Philadelphia community, bringing them to fruition between commissioned projects — surviving and providing for my son on the bare minimum, yet exhilarated and fueled by creative pursuits. Growing up with very little taught me that any financial hardship endured to live authentically aligned to my calling is well worth it, and that I could bring my passion to fruition through relentless hard work and grit, always pursuing excellence with no exception. ▸



Over time, this initiative has become the core of my commissioned work. By forging partnerships with environmental stewards and cultural institutions, the Eco Mural Project encompasses meticulously researched, ecologically themed murals that immerse viewers in atrisk ecosystems while addressing urgent issues like habitat loss, biodiversity decline, and environmental degradation. Programming has evolved in tandem — from youth coloring pages and herbalism workshops to mindfulnessinfused painting days and free-standing murals installed on custom-fabricated panels — each element designed to deepen community engagement.



At John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, I created “Eco Mural 11”: two large-scale murals, with one wrapping around the refuge’s kayak trailer, greeting visitors as they enter the trail system, and the other filling the lunchroom of the visitor center, where thousands of students gather each year to learn about the natural world. These murals do more than add beauty — they extend the refuge’s mission by using art as a tool for education and inspiration. They invite every visitor to see themselves as part of the ecosystem and as stewards of the land, reinforcing the idea that conservation begins with connection.



Installed at Pennsylvania Hospital’s OB/GYN wing, “Eco Mural 18” explores women’s ancestral bond with healing plants, inspiring on-site herbal workshops.

“Eco Mural 20: Artelo” is located at the Artelo hotel in Kennett Square, celebrating local medicinal and pollinator species through fine art botanical illustrations set against geometric patterns. This was created in partnership with Square Roots Collective and Kennett Trails Alliance. ▶



“Eco Mural 21: Bartram’s Garden” is an eight-panel free-standing series at the 56th Street Gateway, highlighting Lenape medicinal plants and pollinators through hand-painted murals mounted on custom free-standing structures. Developed with the Philadelphia Housing Authority, Empowered CDC, the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, and Bartram’s Garden, the project featured a series of herbalism and wellness workshops at the mural unveiling—connecting participants directly with the medicinal flora portrayed and deepening community understanding of plant-based healing traditions.



Each mural contains a QR code linking to our Eco Mural webpage, hosting ecosystem write-ups and partner resources, expanding on each project’s mural-making process, so public art becomes a portal for learning and action. Two new projects are currently underway, and each represents an exciting new chapter in the Eco Mural Project’s evolution — both thematically and in format. In my West Philadelphia studio, I’m currently hand-painting each mural using fine art techniques on poly-tab material. Once complete, the painted mural will be permanently affixed to custom-fabricated Illumalite and steel structures and installed along the trailways.



Community collaboration is at the heart of this project. Two public mural painting workshops will allow local residents to co-create and engage with the pieces, bringing a sense of shared ownership to the trail experience. Each panel also features a QR code, linking trail goers to our Eco Mural webpage with research, cultural storytelling, and native pollinator gardening guides—transforming a walk through nature into an opportunity to learn and reflect. Installation will take place in fall 2025.

Every mural I paint is born from a belief that art and advocacy are inseparable. When I paint the delicate veins of a leaf or the iridescence of a butterfly’s wing, I’m not just creating an image — I’m giving voice to ecosystems that often go unnoticed. My goal is to transform blank walls into living classrooms, where passersby pause, connect, and feel compelled to act for the planet. By weaving together ecological science, cultural heritage, and community stories, I strive to leave urban landscapes richer, not only in color but in purpose — sparking meaningful change that will echo for generations. >



Founded by Kala Hagopian, Hagopian Arts is an independent, female-owned public art initiative. With a focus on imagery inspired by nature, Kala creates luminous murals that juxtapose highly rendered realism with vibrant geometric patterns and atmospheric elements. These artworks celebrate the beauty of the natural world while transforming urban spaces into dynamic narratives that highlight ecology, culture, and community. Serving a wide range of clients, Hagopian Arts prioritizes collaboration and community engagement. By integrating art, education, and advocacy, Hagopian Arts engages diverse communities to foster pride, belonging, and collective responsibility for the natural world. Learn more at hagopianarts.com/new-eco-mural-project and on Instagram (@hagopianarts) and Facebook (hagopianarts).

Photography by XXX.

