

Historic Hemet Theatre

PRESS RELEASE – May 3, 2021

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MURALS OF MEMORIES AT HHT

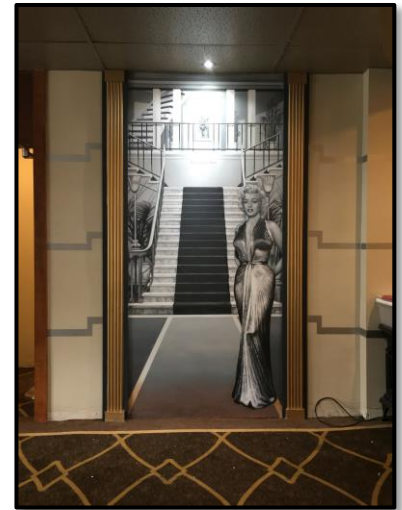
By: Emily Rand

Music blares from a boom box, as Dan Melendez works in the lobby of Historic Hemet Theater (HHT) to finish the work that consumed his last year. Finding himself a man alone with his art through the Covid-19 lockdowns, his art deco details and large murals speak of his talent.

Growing up in Southern California, Melendez made a name for himself in art. Working in Michigan for the Detroit Red Wings and Tigers, he also painted murals in both professional stadiums. Then, across the country, painting murals for Bass Pro Shops, McDonald's, and Budweiser. He found a home in Michigan; but helping family came first. Family brought him back to Hemet.

Hemet is not exactly known as an overly artistic community. However, Melendez continued solo projects in Michigan for major clients and around the country. With the goal of less isolation, he found his way into the Hemet Theater.

Like many of us, Melendez first walked into the theater and met Bryan Carrier. That was in February 2020. Melendez immediately realized a fast friendship with both Bryan and the theater. He could not imagine that one month later, as he began work on Marilyn Monroe in one of three large murals, the pandemic would shut down every theater in the country.



MARILYN MONROE BY DAN MELENDEZ IN HHT LOBBY



DAN MELENDEZ WITH LOBBY MURAL OF HHT LOGO

Melendez recounts his surprise and the work involved to bring the art deco themed lobby to life: "All of a sudden I found myself alone with my work, going up and down ladders, crawling along to finish everything."

The three murals, the art deco designed theater logo, a life-sized wooden cut-out of Elvis, and the same gold border pattern in the lobby are all hand-painted by Melendez.

"Everything in the lobby is coordinated. I did a lot of the stuff laying on my stomach, on my hands and knees, and squatting like a catcher in a baseball game," he explained.

Working with the Carriers for the HHT renovations allowed him to continue his art in what was supposed to be a lively theater community. The closure changed those plans. He received the architectural sketches of the theater produced by Steve Covington, which cemented the concept for one of the large murals.

As you walk into the theater a 12-foot-long mural of the Hemet Theater runs along the left side of lobby. This mural also contains a memorial to Bryan Carrier. As Melendez said, “it was necessary to keep Bryan in the theater in some way; I wouldn’t have even been there without him.”

Among other losses the theater suffered during the closure, this was the hardest of all. Melendez, remembering how it all began, told the story, “I had gone in to talk about showing my art and met Bryan [Carrier]. He let me hang up three of my portraits. He did say we needed to get approval from Susan. She approved them; and we talked about the murals.”

Now, with the finishing touches being completed, the opening is almost here. Melendez said of the opening, “After all the hardships the theater experienced during the closure, I’ll be happy to see the doors open, to see people taking pictures in front of Marilyn.”

Coming in June you can see this masterpiece of the golden age of Hollywood for yourself. Get your tickets in person at the Box Office or visit the website www.HistoricHemetTheater.com. To see more art by the artist, Dan Melendez, visit him at [danmelendezart](https://www.instagram.com/danmelendezart) on Instagram.

Information on all theatre events is available at www.HistoricHemetTheatre.com or by calling (951) 658-5950. Box Office hours, Monday thru Friday, 11am – 5pm.



MURAL DEPICTING THE FUTURE FACE OF HIHT, BASED ON COMPUTER RENDERING BY STEVEN COVINGTON