

# The story behind the Frederick Douglass mural

Ross Blair is an artist and technologist, and you will almost certainly have noticed his work on the streets of the capital.

He created the Frederick Douglass mural on a gable end in Gilmore Place, and he later took the rather odd phone call from the Home Office asking if they could gift a **photo** of the mural to President Joe Biden. We think they got one rights free off the internet.



Ross Blair with his work featuring Frederick Douglass on Gilmore Place PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Ross wanted to do something useful during lockdown and was asked by the proprietor of the building to decorate the gable end with something suitable. He said: "We discussed around themes of NHS workers or something relating to Covid, but we then happened on the story of Frederick Douglass which was just unfolding. And I think we did the mural for the right reasons for the right people."

As to how he became an artist, it was not really through a traditional art college route. He explained: "I've just drawn all my life. The world of art and the world of tech just combined. My dad turned me on to fantasy art from a young age and the world of the Lord of the Rings, and 70s fantasy artists. So it was the twin ideas of fantasy and sci fi which came through.

"All I really wanted to be when I was younger was an artist, or a musician, or a skateboarder.

"And I got the idea that I would just have to do it myself. So that feeling that I had to make my own art or music and do what I wanted to do to push myself along a creative path.

"I spent a year at Telford College with the aim of going to Edinburgh College of Art but I didn't get into Edinburgh so I got a bit disillusioned, and for a while music was everything."



Modern Two – PHOTO ©TrenchOne

Asked how he described himself and his work to people he meets he replied that it depends where he meets them first. He expanded: “Genuinely I am many things to many people. I am an artist and technologist, and what I am now is the culmination of a background of art, music and in events.”

Ross produces video animations, and is also experimenting with VR and AI. He has set up a still relatively young business called TrenchOne Industries working with Elph who is a prolific mural artist in the city. The duo really do just want to paint and are passionate about public works, seeking out a commission or a self-found location every few weeks. Ross has worked in industry and so uses all of his past experience to produce a creative output that he is proud of, and of course the work they do also has to sustain their families.





National Monument – reminder to VOTE PHOTO ©Trench0ne

Working with clients such as Edinburgh Gin and Innis & Gunn the business has created impactful art which is aimed at a particular audience. Last year at Hidden Door Festival Trench0ne created the lovely light show projections providing a backdrop on the stage in the main chamber where a variety of musicians played.

The creative studio specialises in visual content, including projections onto buildings – one of their first was a light show projected onto Inverleith House at the Botanics for producers Unique Events.

The artists are both passionate about accessible public art and get out every few weeks to put a new piece of art into the public realm. Ross said: “People want to see beautiful works in the street. If there’s going to be a public artwork it should bring some sort of joy, or a thought provoking moment as opposed to just noise.”

With all of that in mind Ross is working with The City of

Edinburgh Council to set up a mural and public art festival along with other bodies such as North Edinburgh Arts and Whale Arts. In April 2022 the council awarded TrenchOne £10,000 to create a new music-based street art festival. "The festival will encompass city-wide interventions using motivational lyrics from predominantly Scottish artists to create pieces of art in different mediums, for example wraps on the side of the Usher Hall, bus shelter takeovers, murals, neon light installations, projections and so on."

Ross said: "At the moment we have a small amount of funding to begin our first work and we are looking for permission for spaces so that we can bring some positive messaging and positive artworks into the public realm."

The most recent work Ross created was at Coatfield Lane where there is a hoarding up around a site where buildings had been demolished. He said: "We get really positive responses when we paint in the street from the people that we meet. We identify spots that we would like to paint and then design something that is appropriate for the space which is what we did in Coatfield Lane."

If you have a wall begging for a mural or other artwork, inside or outside, then TrenchOne Industries would love to hear from you. [info@trenchone.com](mailto:info@trenchone.com) T 0131 560 6880

### About Frederick Douglass

- Frederick Douglass was a mixed race 19th century abolitionist
- He escaped from slavery in Maryland and led the abolitionist movement in New York with his oratory
- He wrote three autobiographies
- He was nominated to become Vice Presidency of the US
- He did not know when his birthday was but chose Valentine's Day for himself
- He spent two years in Ireland and Great Britain winning

his freedom while he was in Newcastle

- He said Edinburgh was elegant, grand and welcoming
- He was the most photographed American of the 19th century



At Hidden Door in the former Royal High School PHOTO  
©Trench0ne





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