

Lydia Stein
Biography 2009

Lydia Stein started organizing and painting murals at age 18, in her hometown, Worcester, MA. She completed her first community mural project with local youth on the side of a Spanish Foods Store in 1997. That same summer, she organized a group of international volunteers through Volunteers For Peace to design and paint an anti-poverty mural on the other side of the same building. She went on to paint ten murals in Worcester in five years, working with youth groups and volunteers of all ages, on sites such as the local homeless shelter, neighborhood businesses, schools, the YMCA, the YWCA, the public library, and in a community garden. As an artist and a community organizer, she also coordinated the support of business owners, city leaders, non-profits, the carpenters' union, a local church, an international peace organization, and city officials.

She moved to Vermont in 2001 to join the world-renowned Bread and Puppet Theater, a theater of papier-mâché, cardboard, and cloth that was founded by sculptor and dancer Peter Schumann as a protest street theater in New York City in the 1960's. With Bread and Puppet, she grew vegetables, milked the cow, and helped to create and perform huge pageants on the B&P farm in the summer; she toured and performed all over the world with the permanent company the rest of the year.

As a musician and organizer, Stein is also involved in the movement of activist street bands known as HONK! She has volunteered for three years on the committee that organizes the HONK! Festival in Somerville, MA. She organized to bring a street band from New Orleans (2007) and from Rome, Italy (2008) to perform free outdoor parades on College Hill in Providence, and also worked with local musicians to bring eight HONK! bands to Providence on Columbus Day, 2008, for the public event entitled "Brass Bands Conquer the New World". She currently plays euphonium with the Second Line Social Aid and Pleasure Society Brass Band in Cambridge, MA, and is collaborating with other musicians in Providence in a new community street band, the Extraordinary Rendition Band.

In 2005 Stein left Vermont to complete her bachelor's degree as a Resumed Undergraduate at Brown University. She received her degree, with a concentration in Visual Arts, with honors this spring. Throughout her studies, Stein's work has expanded to include detailed miniature narrative painting, commissioned murals, direction of teen projects, and collaborative work.

The mural on the house at 16 Bernon Street incorporates many of the elements that are important in Stein's work. In murals, street theater, and guerilla music performances, she strives to use simple means to transform urban spaces into places of beauty and celebration. Because the Bernon Street mural will have a temporary life span, she has used simple, bold shapes and strong imagery, to produce an artwork quickly with the help of neighbors and volunteers, and to emphasize the power of the transformative and liberative experience that is depicted. All of the materials have been donated by local paint suppliers and by Stein herself. She is pleased to be working on a public art project in Smith Hill, where she has lived for two and a half years.