

Miki Mu and the Bed-Stuy Walls *Transcript*

JM: Miki Mu remembers when she first came to New York in 2003. When she was a hostess at restaurants. When she was a coat checker in comedy club cellars. When working these jobs were her reality. And art was not her job, but merely a passion.

AMBI: coffee shop

MIKI: And I would see people like us today. Not on a weekend, regular day. Just you know, like, I don't know, working on the computer or, just like drinking coffee. And I'll be like, "What job do they have? How come they're allowed to be here? Just drinking? Doing nothing," you know? And then like, not too long ago, I actually kind of realized that. And I found myself being in like, you know, in the same type of situation. And I'm like, "Oh, okay. So I'm doing the same."

JM: Miki is the founder and curator of Bed-Stuy Walls. A mural festival paying homage to the neighborhood.

We're in one of her go-to coffee shops in Bed-Stuy. That's where she's been living for the past 20 years. Michela Muserra, Miki Mu for short, grew up in Italy.

Even as a little girl, she remembers drawing pictures. She eventually went to work at an animation company in Italy, making cartoon advertisement games for companies.

And then when she was 26 years old, she came to New York City to visit a friend. She realized New York was the place she needed to be. She wanted to be an artist.

JM: But recognizing the dream was the easy part. The hard part? Supporting herself while trying to make it as an artist.

MIKI: I came here for my dream, but because I need to pay bills, then I need to work, do something else. And that something else becomes like a vicious circle. And it's dangerous, because you can forget why you came here in the first place.

JM: Miki started Bed-Stuy Walls in 2021. She was visiting her neighbor's shop when she saw the walls of a warehouse up the block.

They needed life.

So once a year she hosts a mural festival.

She selects talented artists.

They come to Bed Stuy and paint these walls.

And after the murals' completion, it's celebrated with a block party for the kids and community.

FRANKIE: But on the first annual Bed-Stuy Walls, that day right in the Uber I looked at her and I said today, your life changes. Your title is no more Miki Mu, the artist. Today you're Miki Mu, the curator.

JM: That's Frankie Velez. The co-founder and curator of Bed-Stuy Walls, and also Miki's partner in life.

FRANKIE: You know? And it's been like that, and her name has been rising since then.

AMBI: street noise

JM: On our way to the Walls, we stop to see one of many characters that Miki has painted around the city.

MIKI: So that bird on the corner, that's my work..

AMBI: street noise

JM: On the corner of Lexington Ave and Broadway is Brooklyn Dreams Juice Lounge. Outside it is a vibrant painting. A pigeon to be exact. It reflects the cartoon nature of the art she paints. He wears a red track jacket and a blue cap with "Dream" written in pink letters. He side eyes us, wondering what we're looking at as he sips his drink from a chunky pink straw.

MIKI: What I like to do when I do murals is to look at the environment and see what I can do to sort of represent, right? Well, that's a big word, "represent." But anyways, this is a juice place, right? So that's where the idea of like, this is one of my characters, the pigeon, representing, you know, like a typical New Yorker. So I basically combined what I like to do with something that will please you know, either the business or the people living around.

JM: Just a short walk away from where we stand is Bed-Stuy Walls.

Located on Lexington Ave, right off of Stuyvesant Ave a.k.a. Do the Right Thing Way. As in Spike Lee's, *Do the Right Thing*. Filmed on the same surrounding blocks in 1989.

CLIP from *Do the Right Thing*

BUGGIN OUT: Yo Mook! Mookie!

MOOKIE: What?

BUGGIN OUT: How come you ain't got no brothers up on the wall?

MOOKIE: Man, ask Sal, alright?

BUGGIN OUT: Aye Sal, how come you ain't got no brothers up on the wall here?

SAL: You want brothers on the wall? Get your own place, you can do what you wanna do. You can put your brothers, and uncles, and nieces, and nephews, your stepfather, stepmother. Whoever you want, you see. But this is my pizzeria.

MUSIC: “Lacrimose” Blue dot sessions

The film is about a changing Black and Brown Bed-Stuy. Evidenced through increased police presence and shops like Sal’s Pizzeria. A neighborhood staple yet pictures on the “Wall of Fame” were not reflective of who the shop served.

Miki recognized who she is. She understands the importance of honoring Bed-Stuy and its richness in culture. Rather than inserting herself and throwing up art that has no connection to what made the neighborhood.

Making the walls beautiful not for who is to come into the neighborhood.

But for those who have been there.

When she first set eyes on the walls of the warehouse, respect for Bed-Stuy was her priority.

MIKI: Yes, that was our main goal since the beginning. To be honest with you, when we got the approval for the block, or at least me, I realized after I turned. I was like, “Oh dang. This is where Spike Lee did the movie.” But this is perfect because without knowing it, we sort of like, you know, merged into what’s already the culture right there.

JM: From Miles Morales holding up Jay-Z’s iconic rock symbol.

To the many Black and Brown women adorned in bold colors.
To the highly detailed black and white portrait of Big Daddy Kane.
To the mural of Biggie from last year that still stands per the residents’ request.

The walls on this block come to life.

MUSIC fade out

JM: Miki views art as an opportunity not to propel her life. But to propel the lives of others. Represented on the walls are artists from within and outside of New York City. Like one artist who told Miki she helped make his dream come true.

MIKI: He was like I always wanted to do something in New York, and specifically in Brooklyn because he’s from here. So he just said I don’t know how to thank you because you made it happen. And I said, well you did everything. I didn’t know, it was just a coincidence but I’m glad this is a dream of yours.

JM: Our conversation ends where it started. In the coffee shop.

JM: So I asked Miki, what are the biggest goals and dreams that she has for herself...

JM: As an artist?

MIKI: Keep doing what I do. Definitely, definitely. Yeah, there's a big... Well, I shouldn't say big fear because I know that I will not go back ever. But it's, I feel like this is a blessing that I keep on doing what I do. And so that's what I want to be, you know what I mean?

JM: So 20 years later, here Miki sits. Drinking coffee as she reflects on that passion that brought her from Italy - that dream career that is now her reality.

MUSIC: "Lacrimose" Blue dot sessions

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