

The Mural

By Sara Braun and Dani Morera Trettin

Two years after Amadou was killed, a local artist named Hulbert Waldroup was commissioned to create a mural honoring him on the street where he lived in the Bronx. But that's not the mural you'll see if you drive by today.

In this episode, Sara Braun and Dani Morera Trettin uncover the story behind the original mural, its controversial unveiling, and why eventually, a new mural replaced it 16 years later.

TRANSCRIPT

MORERA TRETTIN: February 4th, 1999. A 23 year old man is standing outside his apartment building in the South Bronx.

MUSIC IN

MORERA TRETTIN: He's just gotten home from a long day of work. He works as a street vendor in Manhattan, selling cassette tapes and other items on 14th Street. He works 10 to 12 hours a day, sometimes 6 days a week. He's trying to save enough money to go to college.

His name is Amadou Diallo. He moved to New York two and a half years earlier from Guinea, in search of the American dream.

BRAUN: As he's standing in the entryway to his building, an unmarked police car pulls up. They're patrolling the neighborhood, looking for crime. Four white police officers in plainclothes get out. They see Amadou reach for something... and think he's got a gun.

The four officers fire 41 shots. 19 bullets hit Amadou, killing him. But he had no gun. What he'd been reaching for, was just his wallet. The four officers are charged with reckless endangerment and second-degree murder.

A year later, a jury made up of eight white, and four black jurors acquitted the officers of all charges.

MORERA TRETTIN: The Bronx is enraged. America is grieving. And the streets are protesting.

ARCHIVAL TAPE SWELLS UNDER TRACKING

CROWD (Archival):

Whose streets? Our streets!

How many shots? 41!

Whose streets? Our streets!

When do you want it? Now!

When do you want it? Now!

TAPE SWELLS DOWN

MORERA TRETTIN: Joining the protests is a group of street artists and activists.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement say cooling down the rhetoric on some of the signs used by protestors at the rallies and demonstrations would go a long way toward easing the tensions between police and the citizens they serve.

BRAUN: They protest the best way they know: with art

NEWSCASTER (Archival): Street artist Robert Lederman says he's exercising his first amendment right when he paints Mayor Giuliani as Hitler. But 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement say these negative signs and others like them are inflammatory.

BRAUN: Eventually the protests quiet down. But the Bronx is still searching for a way to remember Amadou, and to grieve him. And so they turn to art.

FADE IN Theme Music

BRAUN: A mural goes up in the neighborhood where Amadou lived and was killed. But rather than memorializing him, the mural becomes its own form of protest. It's so shocking that the police are called. It gets defaced in the middle of the night. And eventually ... it gets painted over. And replaced with a new mural.

And so we wanted to know: Why? Why was the mural changed?

MORERA TRETTIN: This is Shoe Leather, an investigative podcast that digs up stories from New York City's past to find out how yesterday's news affects us today.

BRAUN: This season, we're going back to 1999 to tell the story of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Black man who was killed by four white police officers. They fired 41 shots.

MORERA TRETTIN: This is The Mural – In this episode, we are turning to Soundview. A neighborhood in the South Bronx. And how a single mural wall became the epicenter for grief, anger, and healing.

BRAUN: I'm Sara Braun.

MORERA TRETTIN: I'm Dani Morera Trettin

MORERA TRETTIN: This is Shoe Leather.

THEME MUSIC OUT

I: SOUNDVIEW

MORERA TRETTIN: In the South Bronx sits the intersection of Wheeler and Westchester Avenue.

AMBI: Train sound

MORERA TRETTIN: Wheeler is short. Just 4 blocks. Mostly two-story apartment buildings.

Westchester couldn't be any more different. It's a major artery through the Bronx, east to west.

AMBI: Honking

MORERA TRETTIN: It's lined with boutiques, pharmacies, bodegas, and what seems like restaurants of all the world's cuisines.

The avenues meet at Amadou Diallo Place. The block was renamed after Amadou's killing. To honor the place where he lived, and ultimately where he died.

Close to the intersection, I see a sign that reads "Diallo Fashion." No relation to Amadou, just an awfully common last name for West Africans.

AMBI: Loud train

MORERA TRETTIN: Metal pillars line the pavement, supporting the subway platform suspended above the street.

AMBI: Train gets louder

MORERA TRETTIN: It's a terrible place to record clean audio.

MORERA TRETTIN: I'm on the side of the bodega, standing in front of Amadou's mural. I have to stop recording every couple of minutes because of the train. This is like my fourth take, because of the train.

Right next door there's a Mexican restaurant. And then...the corner, there is Gourmet Deli.

And then across the street there is a food truck – a taquería, and then a barbershop and a smoke shop.

BRAUN: The neighborhood has changed since Amadou's mural was painted here in 2001.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: Back then, there was a hair salon, not a Mexican restaurant. And instead of a deli, there was a botanica.

It sold religious artifacts: charms, talismans, mementos...and flowers. The owner was a man named Jovino, or Mr. B as people in the neighborhood called him.

And it's on the outside wall of Mr. B's botanica, where Amadou's mural was painted. Mr. B died in 2004. We tried contacting his son, but couldn't get a hold of him.

So what we know about the mural, and how it came to be, is from the man who painted it. His name is Hulbert Waldroup.

Back in 2001, Hulbert was living in Harlem. He was 33 years old. And he was working as an artist, doing mostly jazz paintings and film portraits.

MUSIC FADE OUT

BRAUN: And on a morning in March, he decided to make his way out to the Bronx. To the street where Amadou was killed. To pay his respects.

WALDROUP: Although I'm kind of a news junkie, I like to have my boots on the ground.

MORERA TRETTIN: Hulbert had been reading the news that morning. It'd been two years since Amadou's killing. And it was still in the news cycle.

WALDROUP: I remember, like, trying to find my way to the Soundview section of the Bronx. I had never been there.

MORERA TRETTIN: And it's on that trip that he met Mr. B.

WALDROUP: I walked into his store and you know, I bought a few things, of course, and we struck up a conversation about the shooting, and I told him I'm an artist, and I just wanted to come here and see. And he asked if I wanted to do a mural on the side of his building.

MORERA TRETTIN: Hulbert, like Amadou, is black. Growing up in Chicago, he always felt like people of color were treated unfairly by police.

WALDROUP: Wow, that could have been me. Every mother, every mother, every father. Like, well, that could have been me. They could have been my son, you know what I mean?

MORERA TRETTIN: And so that was on his mind as he was deciding whether or not to paint the mural.

WALDROUP: You know, when he asked me to do the mural, I don't think I said yes right away. I think I just thought about it a day or talked to some friends and came back a day or two later and say, yeah, I would be honored to paint a mural here on the side of the building.

MORERA TRETTIN: That decision, and the mural he painted on the corner of Wheeler and Westchester Avenue, was about to transform the dynamics of the neighborhood.

II: A MURAL GOES UP

BRAUN: Hulbert gets to work on the mural in April of 2001. And he does so behind a giant drop cloth, keeping the mural hidden. We asked him what he remembered about working on Wheeler Avenue.

WALDROUP: Everyone was supportive. People were curious. Hey, what are you doing? What are you working on?

You know, people would chime in and say, oh, you need to do this. You need to include that, you know what I mean?

MUSIC IN

MORERA TRETTIN: After working on the mural for two weeks, Hulbert is ready to show the world what he's been up to. The date is set: April 25, 2001.

WALDROUP: It came time for my unveiling and I told the people in the neighborhood.. I'll never forget this. They came out.

MORERA TRETTIN: April 25th is a warm spring day, already 80 degrees by noon. Dozens of people are gathered outside the botanica.

WALDROUP: The people in the neighborhood, they felt that the community..it was a great injustice done to the whole community. And they came out.

BRAUN: Hulbert pulls down the drop cloth, unveiling the mural.

It covers the entire wall. 20 feet tall and 35 feet wide. At the top, the title: "The American Dream." Red, white, and blue letters on an American flag that is in flames. Below are four police officers; each one holding up a gun. Their faces are covered by Ku Klux Klan hoods.

MORERA TRETTIN: To the side stands the Statue of Liberty. Her face is a skeleton. Instead of a torch in her hand, it's a gun.

BRAUN: And there, right in the center, is Amadou. He wears a red tee-shirt. He isn't smiling, his big eyes staring out onto the street.

MORERA TRETTIN: Someone who happens to be driving by, just as Hulbert unveils the mural, is Sergeant Franklin Sorensen. According to a New York Times article, he sees the officers painted in KKK hoods. He jumps out of his patrol car and finds the closest phone, calling for backup.

WALDROUP: People were clapping and within two minutes... here's two squad cars and more squad cars and more squad cars and um, police start to question me: Who did this? You're going to jail. Do you have permission? Even if you have permission, you have to take this down or move this. We don't like this. This. You're causing trouble in this neighborhood. This, this, this.

WALDROUP: I remember being scared shitless.

MUSIC OUT

MORERA TRETTIN: Hulbert says that the crowd starts getting in between him and the police. And that things get so intense that the local assemblymember, a guy named Ruben Diaz, has to get involved to help mediate.

MORERA TRETTIN: And so we wanted to talk with Assemblyman Diaz ourselves, to hear his perspective on what happened.

BRAUN: Hello! Can you hear us?

DIAZ JR: I can hear you loud and clear.

MORERA TRETTIN: So we called him up, and asked him about that day.

RUBEN DIAZ: What happened is that the landlord of the property initially gave Hulbert permission to paint the mural.

He started backtracking once he saw what the mural was and all the attention it was getting. So initially he said yes not knowing what the mural was gonna entail. But then when he saw that the mural was up and he saw that the police were upset and he saw that the cameras were around, he started to get nervous about it.

BRAUN: Diaz says Mr. B sort of panicked when the cops showed up asking questions about the mural.

RUBEN DIAZ: And so when the cops were approaching the landlord, the landlord was not clear as to whether or not he gave Hulbert the permission. And so therefore they started then— you know, being belligerent to Hulbert.

MORERA TRETTIN: Mr. B didn't tell the cops right away that he had asked Hulbert to paint the mural. But eventually, he owned up to it.

And so the standoff between the police and the crowd ended.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: But we wanted to understand – was it just the police who were upset with the mural? How did this community – the same community where Amadou lived – feel about it?

So we went searching for some first hand accounts of what people thought back in 2001. We combed through articles that came out at the time.

MORERA TRETTIN: One quotes a 47-year old man from Soundview who said, quote, “the irony of it is that Diallo came for the American dream, and it turned out to be a nightmare.” So he thought that the mural did a good job representing the United States.

BRAUN: We found another article that quoted Hulbert at the time. He said he had gotten quote “nothing but praise and thanks from neighborhood residents who have seen his mural.” A woman even tells Hulbert that she wished she owned a building of her own so that she could commission him to put up a similar mural.

But one person who definitely did not love it was Mr. B. He said to the Daily News Express that he never asked Hulbert to quote “do those kinds of things.” He acknowledged that the community loved it, but to him, it was too much.

MORERA TRETTIN: How do you know, how did you feel like, you know, you’re working on this as an artist, and then the person who commissioned it tells you, like, mhm, not really my thing?

WALDROUP: Sure, he wanted a picture of Amadou Diallo on this side, you know, but, I, I told the full story, so, yeah. I mean, any business owner doesn’t want, you know, doesn’t want, unwanted attention, you know what I mean? Try to stay low key.

BRAUN: And it turns out, Mr. B wasn’t the only one who felt this way. Someone else wanted to make it clear that they didn’t agree with the mural’s message. But they decided to use a paint brush instead of words....

MUSIC OUT

III: THE SCARLET LETTER

MORERA TRETTIN: Two days after the unveiling, Hulbert gets a phone call from a guy who works in Assemblyman Diaz’s office.

WALDROUP: He said, you know, your mural, it’s been defaced in the middle of the night.

BRAUN: A young man walked up to the mural with a bucket of black paint in his hand. He pulled out a paint brush, and covered the section of the mural that featured the four police officers in KKK hoods.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: Someone later says he saw the whole thing happen. His name is Hernando Reyes. And he’s a reporter for a local Spanish-language radio station.

He says quote “I’ve never seen someone painting so fast.” Reyes also claims that Mr. B watched the man as he painted over the police officers. And that he didn’t do anything to stop him.

MORERA TRETTIN: We tried reaching out to Reyes. In 2016, he started campaigning to become the next president of Colombia – from Queens, New York. .He never responded to our requests.

BRAUN: Mr. B denies being involved in the defacing. However, he does acknowledge to Newsday being quote “under tremendous conflicting pressures from police friends and community residents about the artwork.”

BRAUN: To this day, no one knows who defaced the mural. Here’s Diaz again.

MUSIC FADE OUT

RUBEN DIAZ: We always believed it was some outsider, meaning outside of the community, who was pro-police. That was what was out there. But nobody was able to prove who did what.

MORERA TRETTIN: Diaz asks Hulbert to fix the mural, and offers to pay for the supplies. So that next day, Hulbert gets to work.

And as he does so, he meets Kadiatou Diallo. Amadou’s mother. She’d been leading protests alongside the Reverend Al Sharpton.

MUSIC IN

WALDROUP: Al Sharpton said the mother would like to meet me and thank me, and she was a very beautiful, graceful woman.

MORERA TRETTIN: Do you remember how that interaction was like or anything that she said?

WALDROUP: She said that doesn’t look like my boy. [Laughs] You know? And and, and I was like, I did the best I could do with the pictures that I had. You know, I’m sorry,

But, you know, that was a little chuckle. And she said: my my son was more handsome.

BRAUN: But Hulbert’s goal was to focus on the cops.

WALDROUP: I wanted to humiliate the cops. And I thought the best way to humiliate them was to put them in Klan hoods and, uh...so that’s what I did.

WALDROUP: I wanted to give them, really, the Scarlet Letter.

MUSIC OUT

IV: “IT’S ABOUT COMMON DECENCY”

MORERA TRETTIN: The mural wasn’t the first time that a piece of art in New York caused an uproar. Especially work created by Black artists.

There was a major blowup in October of 1999. The same year Amadou was killed, and 2 years before Hulbert's mural.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): New York City and the Brooklyn Museum of Art remain at loggerheads over a controversial show scheduled to open Saturday.

MORERA TRETTIN: A new exhibit was opening at The Brooklyn Museum. It was called the Sensation Exhibition.

Its creators wanted to stir the viewers, to cause sensation. The pieces range from portraits painted with human blood, and decapitated animals, to sexually explicit images.

But the most controversial is a painting of the Virgin Mary decorated with elephant dung. Plastered about are images of women cut from pornographic magazines. It's painted by Black artist, Chris Ofili.

GIULIANI (Archival): I'm not going to negotiate about something like this

MORERA TRETTIN: The painting causes so much outrage that then-mayor Rudy Giuliani acts. He speaks out against the exhibition, and starts trying to defund the museum.

GIULIANI (Archival): I think this show is disgusting. I think there's a disgusting show. I think that, it's a terrible, terrible use of government funds, and I think that's the issue.

MORERA TRETTIN: And he succeeds. Giuliani is able to convince the city council to slash the Brooklyn Museum's funding by 7.2 million dollars – a third of its annual budget. The museum also gets funding from the federal government. And members of Congress join in the outrage.

SENATOR TRAFFICANT: (Archival): It's not just about the Virgin Mary splattered with cow manure. It's about common decency.

MORERA TRETTIN: The House of Representatives passes legislation to suspend the museum's federal funding. With ample bipartisan support.

SENATOR TRAFFICANT (Archival): This isn't freedom of expression. This is stone cold promotion of garbage. Congress should be supporting Mayor Giuliani's attempt to stop public funding of this type of trash.

BRAUN: The art world responds with their own outrage. To many, it's government censorship. Politicians and advocacy groups speak out in defense of the museum.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): The First Lady, stopping in Harlem to push for more federal funding for education, says the mayor is going too far.

CLINTON (Archival): Our feelings of being offended should not lead to the penalizing and shutting down of an entire museum.

BRAUN: Even Carrie Bradshaw takes a crack at the debate in an episode of Sex and the City from 2000.

BRADSHAW (Archival): Yep, that's the woman.

BLATCH (Archival): Look at that bulge! It's shocking.

BRADSHAW (Archival): Yeah, I know. Hurry up and look before Giuliani shuts it down.

MORERA TRETTIN: During all of the back and forth, the museum is able to stay open. And the painting stays up.

But it doesn't take long for the painting to be defaced. Two months after the opening of the exhibition, a 72-year-old white man smears paint on top of the art piece. He's later arrested.

BRAUN: The museum reacts with a vibrant yellow cigarette-warning-style sign: "may cause shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria, and anxiety."

MORERA TRETTIN: It all comes to a head in a legal fight: Giuliani versus the Brooklyn Museum. And the Brooklyn Museum wins. A federal judge rules the funding freeze unconstitutional – that it violates the Museum's first amendment rights. So not only does the funding start up again, but The City Council is also ordered to pay 5.8 million dollars in repairs to the Museum.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: But the Brooklyn Museum isn't done with provocative art. And neither are Black artists.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): The year before last, the Brooklyn Museum and Catholic groups tangled over a painting decorated with lacquered elephant dung and dubbed the Holy Virgin Mary. Now it's Yo Mama's Last Supper, a photograph featuring the artist herself naked as Jesus.

MORERA TRETTIN: Renée Cox, the artist who made the photograph, is seen standing in the middle; naked with open arms. On her sides – black men posing as the twelve disciples. It's the scene of the Last Supper.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): Bill Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is furious.

DONOHUE (Archival): If you want to have a Black person as Christ, that's okay. If you want a Black female as Christ, that's okay. Full frontal nudity? It's just gone a little bit too far.

MORERA TRETTIN: Giuliani is enraged, *again*. Here he is talking to a group of reporters.

GIULIANI (Archival): This photograph is intended to attack the Catholic religion. The person who did the photograph almost says as much. It is clearly obscene. And your newspaper won't, won't show it.

BRAUN: After losing the last battle in the courts, the city comes up with a new way to target art. It creates something known as the Decency Commission.

MORERA TRETTIN: The commission's goal is to judge the decency of art. It then makes a recommendation to the city council whether or not they should fund the project. The board doesn't include a single artist.

BRAUN: But notably, it does include Giuliani's own divorce lawyer Raoul Felder.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): As veteran divorce lawyer Raoul Felder has gotten his share of nasty phone calls, but he says he's never fielded anything like the barrage that came in after he agreed to serve on Mayor Rudolph Giuliani so-called decency commission. He's afraid that that attitude will poison the conversation about whether government should support institutions showing art that could offend taxpayers.

FELDER (Archival): What we should have here is a debate and maybe it can [have] wisdom, maybe nothing. Maybe light, maybe heat. But it's a fair subject for debate. There's great questions involved here.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): Many observers say the commission is just an outlet to let Giuliani blow off steam about his anger over anti-Catholic art at the Brooklyn Museum. Felder says no, it's a serious panel. But, he adds, it may end up recommending no change in the way the city supports the arts.

MORERA TRETTIN: The commission issues a negative recommendation on Yo Momma's Last Supper. Meaning, that the city shouldn't fund its exhibition with taxpayer dollars. But the decision is not binding, and the photograph is allowed to run its course.

MUSIC OUT

BRAUN: It was just two months after Yo Momma's Last Supper, that Hulbert unveils his mural for Amadou: "American Dream." Many expect the decency commission to target the mural, for its depiction of the white police officers in Klan hoods. After all, the commission was created to battle so-called "offensive art."

MORERA TRETTIN: Journalists ask for comment, but the commission remains quiet.

BRAUN: And two major events are about to happen in New York City that will change the conversation around art.

NEWSCASTER (Archival): Oh! There's been another one! Another plane just hit! [LOUD GASP] OH MY GOD! Another plane just hit! OH MY GOD! Another plane just hit another building!

MORERA TRETTIN: 9/11 happens. And the city no longer has the time or resources to investigate art.

And on top of that, Giuliani's time as mayor is about to end.

Shortly after 9/11, there's an election for a new mayor. One of the candidates is Michael Bloomberg. He campaigns on defending the arts of New York City. As a board member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, his take is clear: city mayors should support the arts, not defund them.

In November of 2001, he wins. And one of his first acts as mayor is to dismantle the decency commission.

And so Hulbert's mural seems to be safe. For now.

V: A HAIRDRESSER'S IDEA

BRAUN: After the unveiling of the mural, the dust sort of settles. And over the next few years, it becomes a major attraction in the Bronx.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: People come from all over the world to see the mural and its depiction of the quote "real New York." Tour guides actually lead tours to see it. One guide explains to the New York Daily News that tourists come to Wheeler Avenue because it's quote "gritty and tells a story."

Another guide says quote "Amadou Diallo is like the Disneyland of the Bronx." He said that no tour would be complete without it.

MORERA TRETTIN: We asked Ruben Diaz, the assemblymember, what he thought of the influx of tourists.

MUSIC FADE OUT

MORERA TRETTIN: He went on to serve as the Bronx Borough President from 2009 to 2021.

RUBEN DIAZ JR: There were so many people who, who after the Diallo killing, they came to New York and they were going to find their way to the Bronx. They read and saw or were affected in some way, shape or form by the Diallo killing.

BRAUN: While some members of the community welcomed the influx of visitors, others were not so happy about it.

RUBEN DIAZ JR: I'm sure that there were people who, after a while were like, that's it. We don't want all of these people to clog up our block or park in our streets or these giant busses, you know, with folks who, from foreign lands coming in and taking pictures of us, like we're some type of zoo.

BRAUN: But over the years, the mural began to deteriorate. The tourist buses stopped coming.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: Like the mural itself, interest in Amadou's story was fading.

MORERA TRETTIN: Fast forward to 2017. A cold winter morning. A local artist walks past the mural to get to her appointment at the nearby hair salon. Her name is Hawa Diallo. No relation to Amadou.

DIALLO: I used to come and wash my hair. And the lady was, she know me. Then she was like, Oh, Miss Hawa, you do art? Right. I say, yes, I do, I'm trying.

MORERA TRETTIN: Hawa tells us this story as we sit down together at a West African restaurant in the Bronx, a couple of blocks away from the mural.

DIALLO: Then she was like, the Amadou Diallo mural is fading. Tourists are not coming anymore. This is not nice, you guys should renew it.

BRAUN: Hawa tells the hairdresser that she'll think about it. Her daughter, Zainabou goes to get her hair done at the same spot shortly after. The hairdresser tells her the same thing. That Hawa should repaint the mural.

DIALLO: Then Zaina came home and she was like, Mom! You should do something about Amadou mural because you are a grandma.

BRAUN: But before she makes a decision, Hawa decides there's someone she needs to talk to. Kadiatou Diallo, Amadou's mom.

DIALLO: I told her about it. Then she was like, oh, my dear. You make my day today. She was like, you know, sometimes I go to New York, I get into the taxi, I go over there. I stay in the car and cry. I look at the mural, I just cry. She told me this.

BRAUN: After that conversation, Hawa decides she'll repaint the mural.

MUSIC OUT

BRAUN: Hulbert had told us that his goal with the mural was to humiliate the cops. To not make it about Amadou, but about them. We wanted to know what Hawa thought about that, about Hulbert's mural. So we called her up and asked.

DIALLO: I don't like those kind of actions. Doesn't mean I don't like what he did.

MORERA TRETTIN: "Those kinds of actions" she's talking about are putting the cops in Ku Klux Klan hoods.

DIALLO: It's how he wants to do it himself. Me, what I like in this life, is peace.

MORERA TRETTIN: And so when she begins to work on the mural, she wants to take a different approach. It was important for her to incorporate Amadou's West African heritage into the mural. Who he was, where he came from, what he ate. It's her heritage, too. Hawa came to the U.S. from West Africa when she was 25 years old, During one of her calls with Amadou's mom, she asks him what his favorite food was.

DIALLO: She was quiet for a while. She was like "Oh. I am very happy you asked me this. She said because you taking me back so much about how I used to feed Amadou things that he like to eat." I said, okay, what is that? She said latchiri kossan.

MORERA TRETTIN: Latchiri kossan is a traditional West African dish. It's often served at weddings and special events.

BRAUN: And so with her conversations with Katiatou in mind, Hawa and her former art teacher, Tijay, start working on the new mural. It was the dead of the winter. We asked them why they felt such an urgency to change the mural right then. Couldn't they spare themselves the pain of painting in the freezing cold?

MOHAMMED: I agreed to do it when she told me the intention.

MORERA TRETTIN: That's Tijay.

MOHAMMED: There's going to be regret if we know that this portrait is going to heal the mom and we delay the portrait and anything, God forbid, had happened in between, we would always be, guilty in our mind about what happened. Because it's a weather. It's just the weather.

So I thought, well, let's just do it. To heal the woman. Yes, we are from Africa. We are not used to the cold, but we just had to do it.

BRAUN: Hawa said the people in the community were supportive of them repainting the mural.

DIALLO: I think people were happy that we renew it. Yeah. People was giving us water and giving us support. They're happy about it.

MORERA TRETTIN: They spend two weeks painting. And on January 28, 2017 ... Hawa is ready to reveal the new mural.

MUSIC IN

VI: A NEW MESSAGE

BRAUN: It's another cold morning. Hawa is dressed in a bright red coat and black furry boots. A black and white scarf is wrapped around her head. Next to her is Kadiatou. She's wearing all black. And next to her is Ruben Diaz Jr, the former assemblymember and now Bronx Borough President.

DIALLO: It was a lot of people, my community. A few people was there, and my daughters were there and my grandchildren. It was family there too.

BRAUN: That must have been so special.

DIALLO: Yeah, it was, it was.

MORERA TRETTIN: Together, Hawa and Kadiatou take down the drop cloth that had been covering the new mural. There is no longer the face of a sad boy staring out. Amadou's face is still the centerpiece, but now he's smiling. His face is bright and hopeful. He's slightly aged to match how old he would have been nowadays.

There are footsteps behind him: small, baby ones on the Guinean flag, adult ones on the American flag. Then there's the latchiri kossan—Amadou's favorite food. His last words to his mom are written on the bottom: MOM, MOM, IM GOING TO COLLEGE!

DIALLO: Many people came and many people thanked me before even that day.

BRAUN: The neighborhood seemed to like the new mural, which made Hawa happy. But she made it with only one person in mind: Kadiatou.

DIALLO: Her happiness was, my... you know, the most important part.

Because as a mom, nobody wants to go through what she go through. And if I can do something to make her happy, I am happy. I do that, and I make the community heal.

MUSIC OUT

MORERA TRETTIN: Hulbert had never seen the new mural that Hawa created. So we showed it to him.

BRAUN: Here is the mural. The second one.

BRAUN: He was quiet for what felt like an eternity.

WALDROUP: I like it.

BRAUN: You like it?

WALDROUP: I like it. I like it. It's, uh. She put her flag in there.

MORERA TRETTIN: Yeah.

WALROUP: Um, his last words. Um, I like it.

MORERA TRETTIN: A part of the..your original mural remains. Because if you see here, there is, a freezer or a fridge, I don't know. Yeah, it was there and they could not paint. Now they took that away. So now there's the tombstone that you represent.

WALDROUP: Oh, yeah. The tombstone! That's right, that's right. I had the tombstone in there. You're right, you're right, I forgot. I forgot all about it.

BRAUN: Hawa redid Hulbert's mural, but one piece of his original artwork slipped through the cracks. When Hawa painted the new mural, there was a fridge covering the far right side of the painting. It was recently removed, letting through a part of Hulbert's mural— a tombstone he painted over 23 years ago. It reads: AMADOU DIALLO. BORN 1975. DIED 1999.

VII: "I CALL IT HEALING"

AMBI IN

MORERA TRETTIN: It's February 3rd, 2024. Sara and I are making our way to Soundview.

It's been 25 years since Amadou was killed.

A crowd is gathered in front of the mural—Hawa's mural. They are holding a candle-lit vigil to remember Amadou. Kadiatou, Amadou's mom, speaks.

KADIATOU: So I'm going to thank one special person right here. Standing here. Miss Hawa Diallo. She created the mural in honor of my son.

MORERA TRETTIN: Kadiatou and Hawa stand side by side in front of the mural. Kadiatou is taking the center stage – facing the crowd.

Hawa, she stands more to the side, her eyes fixed on Kadiatou.

KADIATOU: She is an artist who saw the mural was growing defaced and really not looking nice. So she worked in winter time to repaint the mural in honor of Amadou. She's here. And...don't cry. You make me cry. Please. Hang on...it's okay. It's okay.

MORERA TRETTIN: Hawa is visibly upset...and you can tell how much it means for Kadiatou to have her there.

MUSIC IN

BRAUN: When we started reporting on this story, we wanted to know why the mural had changed. And the answer seems to have two parts. One is simply because the mural paint was fading. And maybe the anger — over Amadou's killing, and the police officers' acquittal — was fading too.

And the second seems to be because the people closest to Amadou wanted the mural to be a reflection of him. Not a political statement. And that the time had come for healing.

DIALLO: Look, I call the mural healing, it's for everybody to heal. I know it's not easy, but I'll do my part. I hope other people will do their part to heal, both sides.

MUSIC OUT

THEME MUSIC IN

MORERA TRETTIN: This has been Shoe Leather: The Mural. Shoe Leather is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This episode is reported, and written by me, Dani Morera Trettin.

BRAUN: and me, Sara Braun.

BRAUN: Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Rachel Quester and Peter Leonard are our co-professors. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Libraries. Shoe Leather's theme music 'Squeegees' is by Ben Lewis, Doron Zounes (Zoo nes) and Camille Miller, remixed by Peter Leonard.

MORERA TRETTIN: Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Our season's graphic was created by Indy Scholtens with help from Serena Balani. Thank you for listening.

THEME MUSIC OUT