



## Artist: Deanna Washington



You've probably heard about there being a certain picket fence you need to check out in town. And if you have seen it on the corner of Alvarado and Mendocino, you've probably made it a point to walk by it to see its progression over time, especially in recent months where new pickets have regularly been added by the artist. The "One World Picket Fence" is truly a sight to behold. It's vibrant from afar, and when you get up close, it quickly becomes personal. Deanna has painted 30 "Picket Ladies", representing each a unique culture or country. Each "Picket Lady" has a different hand gesture, or mudra, that symbolizes a blessing from doing the mudra. Respect. Compassion. Awakening. The Picket Ladies drew us in with their gaze and we wanted to learn more...

### When did you start painting?

I did not start painting until 7 years ago after my mom passed. She was an amazing artist, but was critical of my artwork, and would pick it apart. It was more befitting, and safer, not to enter her "realm". I found an online class called *Lifebook* that teaches mixed media with instructions so simple, everyone gets to feel immediate success. From there, I took other online classes.

### What inspires your work?

I am pretty passionate about symbolism. In fact, this is my third symbolism project.

My first was a book published in 2000, *The Language of Gifts: The Essential Guide to Meaningful Gift Giving*, describing objects you may give as a gift and what their symbolic meaning is. Back in 2000, there was nothing else out there like it. Nowadays, symbolism is used with gift-giving quite often. You can still find the book on Amazon.

I wrote and illustrated *Disneyland Wisdom: 45 Life-lessons From the Happiest Rides on Earth* in 2017, also available on Amazon. I have also made it into a wisdom card deck available from me ([deannawashington.com/disney](http://deannawashington.com/disney)). I suppose mostly my art is inspired to SAY something, something ordinary looked at from a different viewpoint. Like the Disneyland rides. No one THINKS about the ride. But if an object can be a point for an affirmation, an EXPERIENCE can be, as well. My intent was for people to use the book as a way to enhance their Disney trips with MEANING.

The Picket Ladies were born from my belief that we are more alike than different, underscored by my interracial marriage.

### Your website has a lot of information about this project, but can you tell the readers how the project got started, and how long you've been working on it?

The project literally started on December 17th, the sixth anniversary of my mother's passing. The fence needed repainting I had been toying with the idea to do something unique. Suddenly, I knew what I wanted to do. An empowerment of diversity and unity while teaching us a "sign language" of blessings, so to speak. Yesterday was the first time I actually saw two girls, probably 11 years old, walking by and doing the mudras (hand gestures) as they saw them. That is EXACTLY what I had envisioned. How cool to be able to signal from across the room "perseverance," or "flow".



In January and February, I worked out the logistics and had the design pretty well figured out when Covid hit. Remember how gut-punched we all were, huddling in our house with nothing but our phones and social media? I designed one girl a day for 25 days and wrote up a blessing story specific to what was going on and posted on FB and Instagram. They took me about 4-6 hours to research, design, and then write the blurb.

I paused from the Picket Ladies in May and painted the Tree of Life mural, completed in

about a month, and then started painting and installing the first pickets on July 4th weekend. The final pickets were installed on Oct. 11, Indigenous Peoples' Day weekend (aka Columbus Day). Fifteen weeks of installations.

### How did you choose which countries to represent and what is a Mudra?

First, I gathered together the big and obvious. Some I grouped into cultures, because I could not have, say, England and Ireland and Scotland and Wales. Likewise, Scandinavia/Norse.

From there, I looked at the areas and tried to pick out the most iconic, which is why Poland got chosen over, say, Lithuania. That research included looking up the countries cultural dress and dance. In the Middle East, I chose to break it down to Arabia and Persia. Arabia had to be a belly dancer as you know instantly where she is from. Once again for Africa, I chose the most iconic countries.

Some countries I chose for personal reasons. I have a very dear friend who is Afghan and she does the traditional Attan dance of her people. For some reason I feel a connection with Morocco, so she had to be there.

The word *Mudra* is from India and simply means "hand gesture". If you look at statues of Buddha and others of their gods and goddesses, their hands are in very specific gestures. They each mean something. More and more, the western world is using the same gestures when practicing yoga. They are each said to bring you specific energies by using them. I have chosen to focus on the blessing you receive from the energy, which I haven't seen done yet. So if you look up the Mudra, you are likely to see a different word used for them than what I have chosen. In the world of symbolism, that's the way we roll.

### What do you hope for residents to feel or glean from "One World Picket Fence"?

The Residents of Brisbane have connected with the fence way beyond what I ever anticipated. I especially did not anticipate the children, even the boys, pondering over them. My hope originally was to teach people the hand signals; to see the way we are all alike. All the faces are created from the same template; just the clothes change (with slight variations for some cultures/countries). We are a delightfully diverse community; still, many have not traveled internationally. So I hoped to bring international to Brisbane (especially in light of COVID)!

### Where can people go for more information about the project?

You can stay updated at [PeacePickets.com](https://www.peacepickets.com), which takes you to that section of my website.

### Are you planning any other side projects or special events as a result of finishing the project?

Yes! I am planning a Brisbane Open House for November 8th from 11am – 3pm. On that day I will unveil the "Brisbane Picket Lady 2020"!

I have also started painting some real-life-people pickets, a series I call "Sheros" that will be displayed in a different way than on the fence, as I really want to keep the fence non-political. So far I have done RBG and Breonna Taylor, both will be on display for the November 8th event.

I am also making Picket Products so everyone can have a Piece of the Peace! That includes pendants, Christmas tree ornaments, a coloring book with the Ladies' stories, and a coffee table book to name a few. All of that information can be found on my site.

And there you have it. If you haven't yet gone by and seen this remarkable fence, be sure to do so on **November 8th between 11am – 3pm!** And of course, keep 6' apart, and wear a mask to protect your fellow neighbor because, as the "Picket Ladies" remind us, we are all in this together.

