by Mark Peterson

In the 48 years since a train brought this budding art student from his native Chicago to Minneapolis, Aldo Moroni has made his mark as an artist and community builder. On December 13, the Minneapolis City Council recognized what many in Northeast have long known of this treasure, presenting a resolution honoring Moroni in a joyful and at times poignant ceremony.

This past November, Moroni addressed a packed gallery in the California Building about the progress of his “Mesoamerica” project, a large sculptural set of pieces about Mexican civilization. He noted that his recent diagnosis of late-stage pancreatic cancer means that his project will need to be “finished by others.”

Before the presentation of the resolution, fellow artists and friends, of whom Moroni seems to have an endless supply, filled a conference room next to the Mayor’s office. Well-wishers were jammed against a long table loaded with exotic pastries and coffee urns, and the major activities were taking selfies and exchanging handshakes and hugs. At 9:30, the crowd walked to the nearby City Council chambers, where the standing-room-only atmosphere felt like a political rally for a really nice candidate.

Northeast City Council members Kevin Reich and Steve Fletcher spoke first. Reich called Moroni, “Truly the personification of a public artist in the most ground- and authentic sense.”

Fletcher said, to much laughter, “Aldo, this is a real testament to you. There are very few people who can get the arts community to show up at City Hall, and there are very few people who can get the arts community to show up anywhere at 9 a.m.” He added, “We reflect on your work and how powerful it is to add work to the public space that contributes to change … and reevaluate what’s so special about the different moments in time; what’s so meaningful to anyone, it’s because of the community I’m part of. I’m quite sure that if I hadn’t come to Minneapolis, none of this would have happened. I’ve been very lucky, very blessed, and I feel a lot of love. You all know my situation, but the rule is: no worry. As for the next thing, we’re going to fly there; we’re going to do it joyfully. We did well. We did good work, and we had fun. I’m kind of looking forward to the next place, I hope they have a nice studio.

As he was joined by his twin sons, Moroni added, “This day is overwhelming, and I want to thank you all for coming out, but also for years and years of putting up with my nonsense. There are a lot of things that we’ve done. Mary Altman and I have been together on this for a very long time and we are truly enriched by the programs here, and I know this is a national model for other places. I work a couple of hours a day, I have the best crew in the world, and my at-home helpers Maxie and Marie are the best people in the world to be doing that. I’m not all at worried, and you shouldn’t worry, either. It’s going to be a beautiful ride, and it’s gonna be OK. But it’s BYOB at the final memorial.”

The next day, Moroni was at his California Building studio, greeting people, showing off work for sale, and clambering over his tabletop sculpture to add more little components. His energy seemed not in the least diminished, a fact he noted by saying, “We still have to pay the rent!”

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