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MOCA Jacksonville's new Project Atrium is a black and white study of gluttony

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Boston-based artist Ethan Murrow draws his artwork of a "bacchanal scene of gluttony" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville.

Beginning July 5 and continuing through Friday, Ethan Murrow and a team of four other artists spent their days drawing on a wall at the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville.

Their creation is a photorealistic depiction of a man in the process of gorging himself as he sits at a table covered with food. In the image, which Murrow called a "bacchanal scene of gluttony," the man's feast has been temporarily interrupted by the pot he's wearing over his head.

"Plethora" is the new Project Atrium exhibit, designed to take advantage of the 40-foot-high dimensions of the Haskell Atrium Gallery. Murrow said he views the Atrium Gallery as a sort of theater. The second and third floors are the balconies and the walls are the proscenium.

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Working off a photograph Murrow created in his Boston studio, Murrow and his fellow artists — his assistant Aaron Hauser and Jacksonville artists Thony Aiuppy, Roy Albert Berry and Tony Rodrigues — recreated the images in the photo with black Sharpies — 800 of them.

Murrow was approached by email last summer by Jaime DeSimone, MOCA's assistant curator for exhibitions, who was familiar with his work from her time working in the Boston area.

"Those are the best kind of emails to get," Murrow said.

His initial idea for the space involved something from Jacksonville's history as a silent film production center. A hint of that idea remains in the image of a man with a pot over his head, which Murrow called "a riff off a Chaplin-like moment."

But struck by the lush vegetation he found while visiting Jacksonville and by NOLA MOCA, the museum's popular restaurant, he decided to create an image involving food.

The image he created is reminiscent of Dutch still life paintings from the 17th century Dutch Golden Age. Those paintings were intended to evoke the prosperity of the Dutch people during that period.

The man with the pot over his head in the photograph they recreated is Murrow himself. MOCA's website features a 59 second color video of Murrow gorging himself as he sits at a table covered with cantaloupes, watermelons, corn on the cob, greens, artichokes and pomegranates. (Go to bit.ly/29zFejt).

Murrow said his affection for black-and-white images is a product of his love of old movies and photographs.

He also told the Boston Globe that black-and-white images connect him to his grandfather, who died before Murrow was born. Edward R. Murrow was a pioneering newscaster who broadcast on radio from London during World War II and later hosted several television news shows for CBS.

As with most Project Atrium exhibits, "Plethora" will be impermanent, an idea with which Murrow said he is comfortable.

"When some people learn it will be painted over, they are offended," he said. "But I think art should be a conversation. Is it worth having temporary things? A play or a live music performance aren't permanent."

"Plethora" will remain on exhibit in the Atrium Gallery through Oct. 30.