Lucas Century's Mural at Florida Gulf Coast University
Project Spotlight: January 2011

LOCATION:
University of Florida Gulf Coast
Fort Myers, Florida

MURAL ART:
Water Symphony for the
Bower School of Music

ARTIST:
Lucas Century

TILE INSTALLER:
Lucas Century and Randy Deis

LATICRETE DISTRIBUTOR:
LATICRETE West Palm Beach
LATICRETE Stone Adhesive and Mural Artists Work in Perfect Harmony for Florida Gulf Coast University

By Eric Carson

For more than half a century, LATICRETE has been a pioneering force in the tile and stone industry, dedicated to manufacturing innovative materials and methods to help fuel the increased consumption of tile and stone with easy to use products engineered for fast, problem-free installations.

Designed with the end-user or tile contractor in mind and consistently focused on producing durable, high performance product systems, LATICRETE has a long and proud tradition in discovering new applications and advanced specifications to increase the efficient use of tile and stone in modern building design.

These days, in addition to providing installation materials for some of the most high-profile global projects through proprietary specifications, more and more artisans have discovered that LATICRETE products offer an equal amount of technical finesse for the most intricate mosaic mural installations. In fact, many artists have done so with award-winning results, often with projects that highlight LATICRETE tile grouts that can accent designs in Bright White, 40 designer colors and more. But in Florida a mural artist found the perfect material and method he needed with a LATICRETE stone adhesive and cordless mixer for the vertical installation of the large-format tiles that created the design.

At Florida Gulf Coast University, part of the state-run education system in Southwest Florida, the architecture commission mural designed by Lucas Century happens to fall somewhere in between a full-scale commercial project and a wondrously intricate piece of art. But the simple fact remains, Century was able to rely on an innovative LATICRETE stone adhesive and application method to perfectly translate his vision as an artist to a large-scale interior full-wall mural just inside the glass entrance to the newest building on campus.

With the desire to create a majestic mural for the highly-visible foyer of the new Bower School of Music and Recital Hall at FGCU, Century’s only real concern was finding the right materials and methods for the installation that would require the precision placement of each tile to carry out the abstract design he envisioned. Convinced that the traditional mechanical anchor method would not work, Century began a fruitless search for the right adhesive in area home centers, but found nothing that inspired him with any confidence to evenly install his stencil-etched mural over cement backerboard.

Eventually, Century ran into an old friend who pointed him toward LATICRETE and the entire project fell into place from there. The answer to how Century could execute his 10’ x 30’ (3x9m) etched porcelain tile mural that dominates the entrance wall, turned out to be LATAPOXY® 310 Stone Adhesive in tandem with the LATAPOXY 310 Cordless Mixer. And while large-format porcelain tile doesn’t have the same properties of say a natural granite, the advanced stone adhesive met the criteria that Century was looking for to install his masterful commission mural for the FGCU music hall he would aptly title, “Water Symphony.”

“Honestly, I don’t know how I would have been able to complete this project without LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive,” said Century. “This product really made the difference. I needed to be so specific and every detail was critical for the design to work. For all the time and effort that it took to install this mural there was hardly any mess at all thanks to the LATAPOXY 310 Cordless Mixer. This was also a critical factor because my hands needed to be completely clean and free of adhesive to set the tiles and not disrupt the old-fashioned ink-stirred stencil-etch marble design on each tile.”

Century, a well-known local artist of particular skill working with a multitude of mediums, has had a profound impact on the Gulf Coast of Florida with several of his works. From his post on the serene island of Sanibel, Century has a wealth of resources available to consistently refresh his creative vision. As an artist, the calm, leeside barrier-island offers an endless supply of inspiration from its pristine beaches and fragile sand bars, to the swirling shoals left behind as the Gulf Stream waters softly roll onshore and then retreat again.
In fact, it was these sand shoals that had been swirling through Century’s mind for years during his daily morning walks, as he watched the elegant patterns left behind as the ocean rinsed through the white sands of Sanibel. Like a songwriter with a perfect lyric trapped in his mind needing a melody, Century's architecture commission mural for the new Bower School of Music and Recital Hall provided the ultimate opportunity to present his abstract vision of the rising waves and moving sands of Sanibel Island.

For Century, the Water Symphony mural for the Bower School of Music represents the fourth time that FGCU has requested his artistic services for the 760-acre campus in beautiful Southwest Florida. So impressed with his previous works of art, the University allows Century free reign to select both the concept and design. Fascinated for years by the innate swirls the ocean leaves in the sand shoals of Sanibel, Century set out to design his mural pieced together with 75 different 2' x 2' (60x60cm) large-format porcelain tiles using LATAPOXY® 310 Stone Adhesive and the LATAPOXY 310 Cordless Mixer.

LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive was formulated for the spot-bonding method of fixing tile and stone on vertical surfaces, and in combination with the LATAPOXY 310 Cordless Mixer, the product system provides tremendous time and labor-savings for the contractor. Providing a fast, permanent bond that will not deteriorate over time, LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive will not stain the hard surface and is ideal for white and light colored stones, or in this case porcelain tiles. In addition to its superior non-sag properties when applied up to 1" (25 mm) thick, LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive withstands shock and vibration and is building code approved for exterior applications by the ICC and IBC, as well. In a pinch, LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive and its incredible psi strength is also available in a rapid version that sets up in just five to eight minutes.

For Century this was no quick and easy project by any means. Like every great artist, he takes great pride in creating beautiful, lasting works of art, and perfectly understands that his creations are only as good as he can install them. With his years of experience, Century knew in advance the general contractor completing an absolute true wall was just “not a reality,” and with the need for a clean, efficient and effective installation, there was no way for him to be mixing adhesive materials onsite while he handled each tile throughout the process.

“Actually, the LATAPOXY 310 Cordless Mixer was critical, too,” said Century. “I couldn’t mix up the product in a bucket and have Part A and Part B on my hands. The etchings were painted with a flat black and any adhesive would show clearly on the design. This adhesive really was a lifesaver.”

Instead, Century would solve all of these problems on his own by using LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive and the LATAPOXY 310 Cordless Mixer to address each concern regarding the substrate and installation. Faced with this 10’ x 30’ (3x9m) vertical substrate that in fact did turn out to be out of plumb in certain areas as much as one-inch, the spot-bonding method for fixing tile and stone featured by the LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive formula allowed Century to compensate for these voids. The ability to apply LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive in different thicknesses was critical to ensure all 75 large-format porcelain tiles were set and secured completely even with each other. Each of the 2’ x 2’ (60x60cm) porcelain tiles created with the grit-blast etching technique employed by Century back in his shop were part of a lyrical design that together told a story. Using LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive, Century was able to maintain the integrity of Water Symphony with the remarkable non-sag consistency and durable, permanent bond provided by the two-component, high-strength epoxy. With the help of Randy Deis, a long-time friend from Sanibel, it took an entire month to install the majestic Water Symphony mural for the new Bower School of Music and Recital Hall at FGCU.

“I had a smile on my face the whole time during the installation,” Century said. “I knew I had definitely found a friend in LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive. It felt almost like a new member of the family to me. Any artist will tell you the design is only as good as you can install it. And in a public building you want to stand back and look at it, be proud of it. LATAPOXY 310 Stone Adhesive is a jewel of an adhesive that really complimented my work.”