

Atlanta artist depicts the city's past with the help of Tech's digital archive library

Jaimee Francis on September 1, 2019 in [Life](#)



Photo courtesy of Jaimee Francis, student publications
Known for its burgers, fries, and famed “What’ll ya have?,” The Varsity has attracted Tech students for decades. What most students have yet to discover is that the long-running drive-in not only serves appetizers with its meals, but also artwork.

While many artists prefer to work at countryside villas, Chris McLaughlin set up his studio in the heart of Atlanta. He arrived to the heavily-trafficked Varsity soon after the 1996 Olympics arrived just blocks away from The Varsity. It was during this booming time for the city that

McLaughlin began selling his art to the tourists and locals of Atlanta.

In an interview with *The Technique*, McLaughlin explained how his career with art began long before Atlanta witnessed the historic lighting of the Olympic flame.

“I started in 2nd grade,” McLaughlin said. “On my way to school, there was a barn that I loved to draw: it just captured my fancy. I would go by that barn everyday and that became a subject for me to draw.”

The child who enjoyed sitting at the top of a hill to draw the barn below had no way of knowing that same barn would burn in an act of arson just years later. McLaughlin still has a black-and-white photo of his beloved building that dates back to the 1960s, as well as his childhood sketches that give the barn new life.

The episode of the burning barn began the artist’s long career in archiving the ever-changing landscapes and infrastructures of cities: McLaughlin’s detailed drawings of iconic monuments and scenes of Atlanta reveal how much the city has changed throughout his over 50 years as an artist. His older works feature relics of the past, from buildings that have been demolished for newer construction to cars that have been replaced by advanced models.

In recreating these older works of his, McLaughlin cited Tech’s database of images that are available through the Department of Facilities Management. McLaughlin not only took images from the Archives collection, but he also added his own with his drawings of the Greyhound Bus

Station that no longer exists, the old Piedmont Hospital of the 1950s, and the pre-renovated Hotel Clermont.

“I used to look up the old pictures in the Archives collection [at Tech], but of course there’s a digital library now,” he laughed. “I’ve got some good, old pictures of Georgia Tech from the early 1900s.”

McLaughlin’s art not only focuses on the monuments of Atlanta, but also on smaller towns across the Southeast, automobiles, aircrafts, drive-in theaters, international destinations, and more. The artist discussed the way in which these works changed his perspective on the world around him, citing the power of observation.

“I’m always observing stuff, like how I did when I was a kid with that barn,” McLaughlin said. “I walk around the town, and I observe things.”

Chris McLaughlin still works at The Varsity, where students can not only meet him and view his collection, but can also observe the familiar surroundings of Atlanta with a new historical perspective.