

The largest music festival in Austin is the annual Austin City Limits Music Festival. This week thousands of people will pour into the city for weekend one of the fest, however, thousands of people will also be leaving with a specially designed poster from the event.

Every year, either a local artist from Austin or a design team gets selected to design the poster for that specific year of the festival. Within the past decade it has been mostly local artists designing the posters, and two of those artists provided a fresh perspective of their experiences as well as what the selection process is for choosing the artist. Local Austin creative Mike Johnston was chosen to create the poster for 2014.

While recounting his experience, Johnston said he was asked by a local DJ named JB to complete a mural for his radio studio. He said from that mural, a friend of the DJ thought that his style would translate well into a poster and then asked him to do the ACL one.

“At the time I was an art teacher and I was like yeah I’ll do it! I felt totally unqualified, I’d never designed a poster before, ” said Johnston.

Sophie Roach, another local Austin creative, was the poster designer for ACL in 2015. Similar to Johnston, she was approached to be the artist for that year as well.

“There’s a design team and they do all of the overall identity for the year and I think they kind of have an aesthetic in mind. Then they try to find artists that fit within that aesthetic,” Roach said.

She also said the design team wanted the poster to reflect the city of Austin and its music scene. After she was asked to submit three samples, they threw each one out and asked her to create another specific design.

Roach described how it was a good learning experience but that she now knows how to stand her ground and say- if you wanted that you should have talked to someone else.

“At the time I was really grateful for the opportunity, it was funny to spend so much time on something and then to go to ACL to see it everywhere but it not feel as satisfying. It was useful to know that that part isn't as satisfying to me. Making the work for me is more fun than how it lives in the world afterwards,” Roach said.

Reverting back to Johnston’s experience, he said “it initially started out as pencil drawings and then I filled it in with color. I just wanted to capture that excitement of-your on your way there- and the buildup of the adventure in just getting to it”.

“That whole experience was super validating, like what I’m doing matters,” said Johnston.

He said that as the chosen artist you get paid to do it but you also get the three day wristbands and to be a fan there too.

“It was awesome and refreshing, they didn’t try to control me as much as an artist like other companies do,” said Johnston.