

CONGRESS

## Mueller as muse: Artists get creative with the ex-special counsel and his report

Before his testimony Wednesday, the former FBI chief's silence has intrigued playwrights, graphic novelists and others who have filled in the blanks.



— Street art of former special counsel Robert Mueller outside a construction site in Washington, D.C.

Brendan Smialowski / AFP - Getty Images

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**By Rashika Jaipuria**

The Mueller report captured much of America's attention over the last two years, and the man behind it – 6 foot tall, solemn and notably silent – has garnered a fan club of his own. He's been made into a graphic novel character, a ghost playwright and even an action figure.

"When Mueller surfaced two years ago and was assigned to make the report, it immediately fascinated me just because of sort of this character that they were pulling up," said Liz Zito, a Brooklyn-based artist. "This guy from the FBI, and the bipartisan nature of it ... this man who's a master of law, and trying to find out what happened with Russian interference."

Mueller has never spoke publicly during the investigation and only briefly afterward, but that will change Wednesday when he will spend hours testifying before Congress. But his silence has spurred artists like Zito to run wild with their imaginations. She filled in the Mueller report's extensive redactions with fan-fiction and performed a dramatic reading in June.

"It was one of those 'Perfect Weather' days," Zito narrates in [Redaction 13A](#). "Agent Robert Mueller felt relaxed for the first time in years. He was driving in his 1967 Mustang convertible, his army cap holding his high and tight (hair cut) in place. He wanted to look good for Margaret. Later, they were going out for lobster rolls and a stroll through Annapolis."

Audience members chuckled, but the laughs stopped once Zito started reading from the report about Russian interference.

### 'The Mueller Report' Hampered by Lies

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While many were quick to criticize the blacked-out sections in Mueller's 448-page report when it first came out three months ago, Zito went to an art store, picked up a pen and added her own narrative.

"I started to become more fascinated with Mueller as a person, but also without knowing anything about him," Zito said. "I didn't allow myself to do any research – I just wanted to take whatever it was at face value and also kind of challenge my imagination to fill in the rest."

She promoted her dramatic reading with a flyer that said: "Be More Informed Than Congress After Just One Reading!!!"

Artists like Zito, along with graphic novel duo Shannon Wheeler and Steve Duin, acknowledge that the Mueller report isn't an easy read. It's dense, legalistic, with a "he said, he said" element, according to Duin. He hopes their book "[The Mueller Report: Graphic Novel](#)," to be released in 2020, will expand on Mueller's findings and provide even more context for readers.

"I would argue that graphic novels (are) probably the perfect literary vehicle for the times," Duin told NBC News. "Because so much of this absurdity is not properly transcribed in words, you almost have to see it."

Duin and Wheeler agreed that Mueller is the ideal graphic novel character.

"He's a natural narrator," said Wheeler, the novel's cartoonist. "His height, his expression, his authority. He has a gravitas to him that just carries."

Mueller is now a muse for many.

Etsy has dozens of products with his likeness, including T-shirts, buttons, art and prayer candles. A Third of July [parade in Montpelier, Vermont](#), had a section dedicated to the Mueller report. FCTRY, a product design company in New York, has sold nearly 10,000 [action figures](#) since January.

"We're looking forward to him testifying," said Jason Feinberg, FCTRY CEO. "It seems like our customers are excited about it, too – we've seen a big uptick in sales since his testimony was announced."

These alternative formats – dramatic readings and graphic novels – reflect the changing nature of politics, Duin said.

"Trump for better or worse ... has totally sort of upset the way politics work," Duin said. "The rules have been changed in a lot of ways about how politics is conducted, how we debate these issues, and the idea that you would then use less restrictive art forms to wrestle with that seems to me to be absolutely appropriate."

But even transforming the report into art requires the utmost accuracy, according to Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright Robert Schenkkan, who wrote "The Investigation: A Search for the Truth in Ten Acts."

The play was a one-night-only [performance in New York City](#) in June, and almost all of the script was direct wording from the Mueller report.

Schenkkan said there is a special significance to hearing those words spoken aloud.

"The advantage of a dramatic performance like this is that you really feel it as a flesh and blood event," Schenkkan said. "You begin to see these individuals that's just names in a headline, but as human beings negotiating a very complicated and increasingly disintegrating moral environment. ... Suddenly it just pops and you get it."

In regards to future projects by him and others, Schenkkan says there is plenty of space for artists to create.

"We're in a national crisis," Schekkan said. "It's all hands on deck. Every citizen needs to be doing what they can do, whatever that is. And for artists, theater artists, what we can do is tell a story well."

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