



Mural Making 101

by Morton Brown

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Introduction

So you want to make a mural? Easy enough, as long as you know how to prepare and properly execute the project. Community murals are very popular and achievable ways of beautifying a neighborhood, establishing landmarks, honoring individuals or ideals, and adding art into the visual landscape of our neighborhoods. Murals can be found anywhere and everywhere around the world. In the United States, the form of community murals that we know today was largely born out of institutions like the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) program in Los Angeles, California, in the 1970s, and the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program in the 1980s.



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Howard Cook, *Steel Industry*, 1936, commissioned by the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture
Photograph courtesy of the United States General Services Administration

The focus of this resource guide is on large-scale painted murals. It presents information about location selection, artist selection, community participation and design review, as well as fabrication and maintenance considerations.

Painted murals offer a substantial “bang for your buck.” For a fraction of the cost of mosaic, monumental sculpture, lighted or multi-media artwork, one can transform an entire façade or sidewall of a multi-story building or a stretch of a street or intersection. But while murals are relatively easy to implement, they must be maintained—typically more so than artworks made of more permanent materials such as steel, glass, etc. Well-prepared surfaces in appropriate locations, high-quality paint, and a final clear coat are as essential to a long-lasting mural as a plan for routine maintenance that includes retouching, cleaning, and properly removing graffiti.

If this approach is followed, one could expect to get 10-15 years or more out of a painted mural before any major repair or retouch is required. And with proper periodic retouching, one can help extend the life of any mural indefinitely. However, keep in mind that murals do not have to be permanent. The Philadelphia Mural Arts Program’s Eakins Oval project is an excellent example of a temporary mural program in which a ground-based pedestrian path inside of a major urban park is repainted each year with a new artwork by a new artist. At the Rose F. Kennedy Greenway in Boston, Massachusetts, a new mural is commissioned every 12-18 months in the most prominent part of the park to promote vibrancy and attract repeat visitors.

This guide walks you through creating and maintaining a mural that will leave a lasting and positive impact within your community, no matter how long it is intended to be in place. Enjoy and good luck!

Choosing a Location



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Kim Beck, *Adjutant*, 2015, commissioned by the Three Rivers Arts Festival
Photograph by the Office of Public Art

Visibility

Potential sites should be visible from multiple vantage points and perspectives. Consider how the mural will be viewed by pedestrians, automobile traffic, public transit riders, and cyclists. Murals can be successful in more secluded areas as well, as long as there is a natural audience that frequents the space. Examples include urban community gardens, playgrounds, athletic fields, swimming pools, and other places that have a built-in audience.

Surface Conditions

The condition of the surface to be painted is perhaps the greatest concern. If the structural or surface integrity of the wall or other surface is failing, the paint will, too. Even a dirty surface can cause paint to fail. To ensure a successful and long-lasting mural, a prospective mural surface should be carefully inspected for:

- loose or peeling paint

- loose or broken concrete



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large cracks

foreign material, such as plant or synthetic material growing through or being deposited from an adjacent or nearby source

bird or bat droppings, insects, etc.

electrical wiring or other nearby safety and access hazards

The best type of surface to receive paint is one that is a raw, unpainted stone or concrete material that is free of any of the above conditions. Wood, metal, and other materials that are in new or good condition can also be satisfactory if properly prepared and sealed. If the surface is not new, or if there are any causes for concern, consult a reputable artist, mason, or painting contractor for further assessment and recommended treatment.

Alternatives to Working on Existing Surfaces

If your selection of a particular venue demands that you utilize a wall or other surface that is not in satisfactory condition, you might consider painting on a separate substrate that can be affixed to the surface either before or after the artwork has been applied to it.

Examples of excellent substrates include, but are not limited to:

aluminum sheet or panel

aluminum composite sheets, such as Dibond, Alucobond, or Reynobond

medium density fiberboard (MDF)

cement board, such as Wonderboard; Cement board is also known as backerboard and is typically used with mosaic tile murals

polyester fabric (aka “parachute cloth”)

These types of substrates have been used very effectively for large-scale murals where site conditions required use of a substandard wall. Painting the mural on a separate substrate is also beneficial when community members such as children are participating in the painting as it allows access to the full surface while avoiding creating hazardous conditions that would require climbing a high scaffolding. Another benefit is that the artwork can be created in a sheltered space, including during winter or inclement weather conditions.

Utilizing a substrate can also allow the removal and relocation of your mural, on the possibility of the property changing owners or if the wall is scheduled for future destruction or removal. Some spaces even utilize a fixed structure that offers the ability to display temporary fabric or vinyl murals in an outdoor revolving “gallery.”



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Before you start any painting, including priming, your surface should be clean, dry, and free of loose material. Make any patches or repairs that are required and allow sufficient time for materials, such as mortar and cement, to cure and dry thoroughly. If you are working on an existing surface that has been in place for some time (e.g., not new construction), you should power-wash the wall. Allow sufficient time for the wall to dry out after washing. Remember that some materials such as masonry will absorb water and “wick” it to the interior, so even if a surface appears to be dry quickly, give it some additional time.

Permissions

There may be several layers of permission that need to be obtained to paint a mural. Even if you have a perfect wall in a perfect location, it does not mean a mural may be painted on that site. Here are some questions to research before an artist is hired or a mural is designed:

Who owns the proposed mural site and what permission do they require?

Is the site located on public property or private property? Does a government office need to give permission to have a mural there? (We suggest contacting the local Art Commission, Planning Office, or Zoning Office to ask about the rules for specific locations.)

Is the site in a historic district? If so, reach out to the local Historic Commission, Planning Office, or Zoning Office to ask about rules in historic districts.

The wall owners may require review and approval of the design, insurance policies, street closures, or demonstrated community review and approval of the mural before you start painting.

In many cities, murals of purely “fine art” (as opposed to ones that contain advertising or signage messages) are not regulated at all—and this is as it should be. However, if you are on city property, or inside a historic district, you might be required to gain approval of the use and design by an Art Commission or Historic Review Commission or other entity. Additionally, try to avoid any usage of business identification or imagery related to nearby businesses in your mural design, as this could be construed by a city zoning department to be business signage, and therefore subject to regulation as such. This is all a little bit of extra legwork, but well worth the effort when you consider the alternative.

Most city staff are very helpful on these issues. They simply need the address of the site and a preliminary design with dimensions in order to properly advise you on your project. Gather these items and give them a call, even as early as the budgeting stage, as permit costs should be ascertained and included.

Selecting a Paint System

Ah, the fun part! The paint! Obviously, choosing quality paint is essential to a mural, but what does that mean? Generally, the answer comes in three parts, which together comprise the “paint system:” primer, paint, and final



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Than Htay Muang, *Pittsburgh Burma-House*, 2009, commissioned by City of Asylum

Image courtesy of City of Asylum

Primer

First, you must always match the type of primer to the type of substrate or surface that you are painting. Primer can be purchased at any quality paint retailer. Primers will come in gallon or five-gallon buckets and they will be labeled as to which surface types they are conducive. Primers are simple and straightforward, but remember that any paint store will tint the primer to any color for no additional charge. A light neutral grey, for instance, is typically preferred to a bright white when painting on a large-scale, highly visible/bright wall—simply for an easier painting experience, or for a particular effect of the subsequent artwork.

The most common surface is masonry of some sort. For this application, a good, time-tested product for large-scale painting is 100% acrylic artist-grade paint/primer. As noted above, always begin with a power-washing of the wall, and then apply a 100% acrylic primer made for the same surface type.

For surfaces other than masonry, use a corresponding primer type. There are myriad types for several surface types, and any good paint retailer can provide advice. A primer that is 100% acrylic, water-based or “water borne” is always preferred for longevity, clean up, and environmental concerns, but some materials, such as certain metals, may require a different type of primer. Consult with a paint supplier about the specifics of your surface if you have questions.



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Paint

When selecting the actual paint, 100% artist-grade acrylic is preferred. Try to avoid using commercial-grade paint — the type of paint that is tinted on site at the retail store using a base paint and sometimes described as “house paint”. Artist-grade paint is pigmented at the factory, and the difference is readily apparent when painting artwork at large scale. The artist-grade paint is more opaque, rich, and vibrant than commercial-grade paint.

There are many retailers that offer 100% acrylic artist-grade paint in larger quantities made for large-scale application. Typically, these quantities are gallon and five-gallon increments, but increasingly can be found in pints and quarts as well. These paints are similar or identical to other artist-grade paints in nomenclature, i.e., cadmium orange, dioxazine purple, phthalo blue, etc., and also should have lightfastness ratings that describe each color’s ability to resist fading in sunlight. Lightfastness ratings of #1 are best, decreasing in resistance from there as numbers increase to #2, #3, etc. Always pay close attention to reds and yellows on this rating as you can greatly affect the longevity of your artwork by simply choosing one type of red over another while not really changing the initial palette at all.

Always use a manufacturer’s directions on paint dilution. A mural painter will always want to make the paint as spreadable as possible over the large surface while also retaining opacity or creating a desired translucency. Typically, most acrylic paint manufacturers advise no more than 10% dilution of water by volume. Acrylic mediums and extenders/retarders can be utilized as well—again, check the manufacturer’s advice on such things before using, and perhaps utilize a test area before using at scale. Above all, don’t skimp on the paint. Use quality paint and use a lot of it. Even when translucency is desired, try to achieve the effect by carefully mixing shades rather than “washing” the paint over the surface, as one might prefer on a canvas. By painting as much as possible with undiluted lightfast paint you will extend the life of your mural by years.

Clear Coat

Finally, the clear coat. There are a few different opinions on the type of clear coat to apply to your finished mural, but there should not be any argument as to the need of some type of clear final coat.

In order to understand the purpose of a clear coat, think of automobile paint, as the same principle is applied in both. These are paintings that are outside 24/7. They get rain, dirt, wind, and all kinds of abuse constantly; they must have a protective coating of some kind in order to last and age well. These coatings not only protect from the elements and vandalism, but make it a lot easier to clean or repair when necessary. There are even some UV filtering coatings on the market that would further help keep the piece from fading in the sun. This is not typically necessary or cost effective when lightfast paint is used, but it is an option on the market.

The most common type of clear coat used on murals is simply a 100% clear acrylic, which is the same composition as the primer and paint that was used on the mural itself. In this way, retouching can be made directly upon the surface, with a subsequent retouch of clear coat in a very easy manner over its entire lifespan. 100% acrylic clear



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Certainly, if you are painting a mural in or on a highly vandalized area or surface, you might want to explore a true “anti-graffiti” type of clear coat. There are two categories of anti-graffiti coatings: sacrificial and non-sacrificial.

Sacrificial coatings are typically also water-borne acrylics that create a protective layer between the final paint and any graffiti that is applied to it. To remove the graffiti, the sacrificial coating is also removed. A new layer of the coating is then applied to the painted surface to protect the artwork from future graffiti. If you choose to use a sacrificial coating, always test it on a sample area or mock-up to make sure that the removal technique works without damaging the artwork.

Non-sacrificial coatings create a “scrubbable” barrier between the artwork and the graffiti, and traditionally have been two-part epoxy paint systems. This allows graffiti to be removed without removing the coating. Epoxy systems can contain very harsh chemicals and should be used with caution as they can be highly toxic. They may be even illegal in your state. However, there are increasingly more environmentally friendly products on the market in many states. It is critical that manufacturer’s instructions are followed and highly recommended that they are applied by a certified professional.

Be well aware that once an epoxy system is applied to the artwork, there is no going back. No removal or repair can be made to the painting underneath should you experience spalling, discoloration, peeling, etc. Regarding discoloration, this type of clear coat may experience adverse chemical reactions to the paint underneath—sometimes an acidic yellowing, or worse. This type of clear coat should only be used in extreme circumstances, over top of the highest grade of acrylic paint, and under the highest of professional supervision. Always consult your local retailers regarding the availability and proper use and disposal of these types of products in your area.

Calculating Paint Quantity and Budget

Calculating paint and other materials for a mural project may seem daunting, but if you follow these steps it will help you figure out how much paint you will need. This can be done before or after you have a specific artwork in mind.

First, determine the square footage of your surface. For example, if you are painting a 10'x10' mural, you need primer, paint, and clear coat to cover 100 square feet.

Second, read the product labels for the coverage rating on each product you are considering. For example, one gallon may equal 200–300 square feet of coverage.

Third, consider how much of each product you will need to cover the square footage you are painting and add 10% contingency.

There are additional considerations. In our example above, you may only need one gallon of primer and clear coat, but many different gallons of paint colors depending on your design. Or, if you have a tight budget, you may only be able to afford to buy a limited number of colors and ask the artist to design to that palette. It is better to buy a



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accurate in tinted commercial-grade paints but can vary a bit when using primer on a raw, absorbent surface such as masonry, and most brands of artist-grade paints do not have such a rating. A good rule of thumb is to go by the commercial-grade paint coverage rating of approximately 200 square feet per gallon for the paints that will be used to create the mural, and use the manufacturer's rating printed on the label for all primers and clear coats.

However, the two paints that will likely run low are primer and the color white. This is particularly true when applying primer to an absorptive surface such as concrete or masonry. You will almost always use at least 10% more of each than you initially thought you would use. Definitely make sure that you have this covered in contingency and project budget.

Determining quantity of paint by square footage is relatively easy, but translating a design into a paint order might seem rather complicated. Work with the artist who designed the mural to make the final decisions on how much paint to buy. Consider buying paint from a company that will let you return anything extra if it is unopened. This is rare, but worth asking about before you purchase. Once you produce a scale design in color, you can pick out all solid colors within the design, roughly apply scale of each, couple that with coverage ratings (allow a little overage for caution), and you should be able to come up with a fairly accurate paint order from this exercise. Colors that require mixing – such as for skin tones – a little trickier to estimate. But again, once you've determined the larger direct colors, you can gain a better sense of the more nuanced ones in terms of quantity.

Note that most local stores do not carry artist-grade paints in gallon or five-gallon pails. Therefore, if you order online or from a local retailer and are required to pay for shipping, you can run a great risk of not having a budget that would accommodate multiple shipments. A good method is to be as accurate as possible on the first order, and have a budget that would allow for a second smaller order—either as contingency or padding.

You will notice that all paints are not priced equally, particularly when you are dealing with the artist-grade variety. On a mural-scale order, this could drastically change your overall budget. That said, how does one provide an initial project budget when the design hasn't been completed or even discussed? Most materials (scaffolding, brushes, primer, clear, etc.) will be the same cost no matter what—you just need to know the square footage. On the mural paint, you could either choose to budget for the most expensive colors or a mixture of your favorites and the most expensive.

Developing a Project Budget



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Stuyvesant van Veen, *Pittsburgh Panorama*, 1937, commissioned by the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture
Photograph courtesy of the United States General Services Administration

A good budget will include these categories:

- Cost of preparing the surface, including power washing, masonry work, etc.

- Size of mural/Square footage

- Purchase of equipment and installation materials (brushes, rollers, tarps, buckets, etc.)

- Cost of primer, paint, and clear coat

- Rental of scaffolding or lift equipment

- Artist design fee

- Artist labor fee

- Assistant fee

- Contingency to cover the “unknowns,” such as additional paint or other materials. This is typically set at 10% of the total project budget.

Depending on the location, other items may include:

- Street closures

- Permits

- Portable toilet rentals for artists and assistants



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It's great to have access to storage, water, and restroom facilities on site but, if these things cannot be negotiated for no cost, then definitely include them in the budget.

Worksite Considerations

A mural project should be considered a worksite. Like any construction project, all rules for safety, compliance, and permitting should be followed. Anyone working on the project should be trained about the on-site rules, and if you are working with volunteers or more than small group of trained staff, it is recommended that rules be posted for everyone to see.



Deanna Mance, *City Composition*, 2016, commissioned by Envision Downtown and the City of Pittsburgh
Photograph by Kahmeela Friedson

Getting up High: Scaffolding and Lift Equipment



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Scaffolding

Articulated boom lift: also known as a “cherry picker” or hydraulic bucket lift machinery

Scissor lift: a hydraulic lift that goes straight up and down with a “scissor-like” extending mechanism

Swing stage: a long, but narrow platform that window washers use on tall buildings. The platform travels up and down a wall via cables

Fraco: a device that resembles a swing stage, but travels up and down a wall via two or more large metal columns

Slope of the surface beneath the mural site is always a concern when deciding how best to access it. Scaffolding can accommodate quite a bit of slope—as one can employ leveling legs with it—but lifts really can’t take much slope before their own safety mechanisms will disallow use.

Additionally, some lifts are electric and might require a chord charge overnight, while others are gasoline- or diesel-powered. There are many local companies that will be glad to rent the equipment to you or your client for your use.

Most rental companies offer information on a website, but the best way to start is to meet their representative estimator on site and procure a quote. It is a good idea to have the rep visit the site with you because they would be able to apply their valuable experience to your situation, potentially saving you money or time, but also perhaps finding the right equipment and solving safety concerns that you might not see. It is a good idea to get quotes from multiple suppliers in order to get the best price.

Usually, it is more cost effective to employ scaffolding for a longer-term project and a hydraulic lift for a shorter one. But this isn’t always the case, and your site conditions may dictate one over the other. In urban settings, for instance, you may be required to procure a city permit—sometimes not for the mural, but for the scaffolding—and to provide a walk-through type of scaffolding over a sidewalk, as the use of a motorized hydraulic lift may be prohibited in that area or for that application. Or, there may be certain times of day where loading in of equipment or scaffolding is allowed. A good company rep will know these things and can help cut through the complexities.

Here is a suggested procedure:

1. Contact at least three scaffolding companies and procure quotes. Ask them about city or borough permitting in the proposed area. Ask if they have knowledge of permitting requirements, and whether they handle such as part of the rental;
2. Double check or check with local city or borough permitting agencies for scaffolding install/de-install/duration requirements; and



Give them some ground rules like “no open-toed shoes” and “no head phones” that can help keep everyone safe and focused.

Finally, scaffolding, lifts, paint, water, electricity, brushes, etc., must all have a secure place at the worksite when you are not painting. Lugging these items back and forth each day is never a good idea. This can also be a deal-breaker for site selection, in some circumstances. Know to ask about these things and work them out with the property owner and interested parties ahead of time.

Insurance

Regardless of the scale of your project, you should give consideration to insurance needs. It is highly advisable that you procure general liability insurance that will cover the project. General liability insurance will cover damage to the site and injury to bystanders who are not working on the project. It does not cover people working on the project, employees, or volunteers.

General liability insurance is required when equipment is rented. Actual coverage parameters frequently change, so this must be ascertained from each vendor at the time of budgeting or rental. Typically, insurance is required by each vendor to protect equipment from damage and injuries during the period of the rental. Most scaffolding and lift rental retailers will offer an insurance rider that one can purchase as part of the rental, but since it is advisable to procure a general liability insurance policy for the entire project anyway, you may add any insurance requirements from the scaffolding retailer to that of your general liability policy for the entire project. This will usually suffice, and not require additional insurance cost.

In addition to general liability insurance, you may want to consider volunteer insurance, which will cover accidental medical expenses, and workers' compensation Insurance for employees. Fractured Atlas has excellent online resources that explain the different types of insurances.

Choosing an Artist

There are many ways to select an artist for your public art project. The two major forms of artist selection are to directly select an artist or solicit applications through a call for artists. Many communities have an artist registry that can be consulted or utilized for direct selection or solicitation. In Pittsburgh, the Office of Public Art's (OPA) [Pittsburgh Artist Registry](https://publicartpittsburgh.org) is a good resource for finding artists. OPA also manages an Artist Opportunities List where you can post your artist opportunity. There are many existing resources about best practices for artist selection and the pros and cons of each method. You can learn more at publicartpittsburgh.org.



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Sandy Kessler Kaminski, *Welcome to the Strip*, 2004, commissioned by the Sprout Fund

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Does the artist have experience working at the scale of your mural site?

If your project requires community participation, does the artist have experience working with community members to produce a mural?

Does the artist have a commitment to on-site safety?

When you call the artist's previous clients, do they seem happy with the work? Would they work with the artist again?

When you interview the artist, are you excited to work with the individual? Do you feel confident in their abilities?

If the artist has no mural experience, is this a realistic first project for them? Will they be successful? Are you willing to give inexperienced artists the support they need to ensure their success/to make a good mural?

Artists should always be interviewed in person or via video conference for a commission before they are awarded a contract. It is a good idea to interview a pool of 3-5 artists to choose the one that best fits your project.

You can use this as a guide, of course—perhaps not all projects would get enough applicants to require a finalist stage—but it is important to meet competing artists and talk through their methods and experience. Even if you directly select an artist from an artist registry, meeting and discussing (if not interviewing) the project in person first is immensely helpful. You would be surprised as to how many times this makes all the difference.

Contracts and Agreements

It is absolutely essential to have a contract with the artist who is painting the mural. There are no exceptions to this rule. The contract should outline all of the expectations for design, fabrication, working with the community, copyright, lifespan of the artwork, the ability to remove the artwork, and the payment schedule for the artist. You can find sample contracts to review at publicartpittsburgh.org.

In addition, you should develop an agreement with the property owner where the mural will be located. Such an agreement should identify:

Site for the mural

Responsibilities of the property owner versus the commissioning entity

Any work that the property owner has offered to provide, such as repairing the surface, providing a storage area, access to water or bathrooms, etc.

If applicable, financial commitment from the property owner

Intended timeline for the project

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expectations and their responsibilities in the project.

Content Development

The development of the content of the mural is an exciting process. Remember, you hired an artist. Let them do their job! Don't allow the community to dictate all of the mural content unless the artist is asking for their participation. Help the artist connect and understand the context of the site and then allow them time to develop a concept that can be reviewed. If you want the artist to collaborate with anyone to develop the content, be sure that you are clear about that in the beginning and that the artist agrees to that process. Or, if the artist wants to gather their own group of people to collaborate with or find inspiration in other community resources, help the artist connect with that they need.

Remember that murals can be anything—they need not be historical depictions of the area, or memorials to ideals or individuals or organizations, or “inspirational.” They certainly can be these things, but they can also simply be art (for art's sake)!

But what is its context? In the urban setting, there is an architectural context, of course—a visual one. Many times, however, there are also historical, social, and other environmental/natural contexts of a site. The design should have investigated and addressed the total context of the site in some manner—but it never should be bound by that context. The best murals transcend and transform/add to context. They don't just repeat what is there already. Also—sight lines, legibility, and different viewer perspectives are often overlooked by amateur muralists when designing for a space. All of these are crucial to a successful design.

Each mural design must be thoughtful of its viewers and respond in design. For instance, one should not include a lot of delicate, intricate design work on a mural that is located 30 feet above the heads of viewers—they won't be able to read it. But in other locales where one has a captive audience on the ground, respond to that by giving pedestrians something to look at on their level. When you have both a long sight line/view shed and multi-modal viewers, consider including elements that work from far away and up close.

It is important that many of the people who experience the surface you are painting on want to experience the mural you want to paint. Take steps to engage residents, business owners, and frequent visitors in the review process of the mural's content. You can't please everyone, but taking steps to make sure people are informed and included in the discussion will result in a more engaging process. People are likely to appreciate that you asked for their point of view even if the end result is not exactly what they asked for. Hopefully the finished product will be even better as a result!



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Tom Mosser and Sarah Zeffiro, *The Two Andys*, 2005, commissioned by the Sprout Fund

Photograph by Renee Rosensteel

Working with the Community

It is advisable to work with the community throughout all aspects of the process. Think of it this way: You are about to create something that the community will see every day. Be a good neighbor. Treat the community with respect and involve them in this commission. Here are some suggestions:

Get permission to use the surface and be clear about how community members will be involved with the project. You don't have to say yes to every request to participate in every aspect. Work with what is realistic within your community.

Invite the community to participate in the artist selection process. Ask them to serve on the panel that will choose an artist or ask them to spread the word to artists to apply for the project.

Invite community members to meet the artist during the design development stage. Host an artist talk or informal gathering for the artist to get to know the place in which they will be working.

Invite community members to review the artist's concept and give their feedback. Consider if the feedback will help you improve the mural, or if it will take you off track. The artist may need to develop more than one concept.

If appropriate, select a few volunteers to assist with priming or painting if the artist is open to this concept and it is realistic for the site.



Maintaining the Mural

When you are planning to begin a mural, consider the ending of the mural as well. There are three questions to ask:

1. What is the desired lifespan of the mural? How long do you want it to last?
2. Who will maintain the mural?
3. Who will pay for the maintenance of the mural?

If you do not have an identified source of funding or a partner who will maintain the mural over time, do not consider your mural to be permanent. Define a lifespan that is appropriate for the budget and entity commissioning the mural.

The contract should outline the responsibilities of the property owner, commissioning agent, or third party/nonprofit partner responsible for funding of any ongoing maintenance. The contract should also give the artist right of first refusal for performing the maintenance. Outline “routine items” and “major items,” and define which the artist would do and which could be done in-house or by the property owner.

There typically is not very much maintenance required of a mural painting if it was properly applied to the surface or substrate. However, there are always issues of unforeseen natural or man-made incidents, graffiti, and just plain old age. At some point in its life, the mural will need to be partially or wholly retouched. This can be done, but typically not by your run-of-the-mill “house painter.” It is important to hire an artist to do the repair or retouching work so as to properly replicate the original “hand” of the work, although it may not have to be the original artist of the work.

Obtaining a modicum of a “maintenance manual” from the artist is a great idea as well. A simple rundown of material types, colors, contact information of artist, assistants, and retailers/vendors used on the job will be essential when it comes time to repair the piece. Additionally, get a scan or the actual original design to keep. The artist, commissioning agency, and property owner should all keep a copy on file just in case. Beyond being an interesting artifact from the event, that design can be used to totally reproduce the mural, if needed—either elsewhere or upon the original site—and if acceptable to the artist and other parties, of course.

Closing Thoughts

Community murals are a very bold and accessible way to enliven a neighborhood and employ artists. With a little preparation and good design, you can have a lasting artwork landmark in your city that your residents and visitors will cherish.



Originally from Arkansas, Morton completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Central Arkansas in 1996. While he earned his Master of Fine Arts degree in painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, Morton also worked as a mural artist with the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program before moving to Pittsburgh in 2001. From 2003 to 2007, Morton helped create and administrate the Sprout Public Art Program, a nonprofit organization that utilized local artists to paint community murals throughout southwestern Pennsylvania. From 2007 to 2009, Morton worked as an art consultant for Pittsburgh Citiparks, and as an instructor at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts. Morton was hired as the Public Art Manager for the City of Pittsburgh in 2009, a position he held until his resignation in late 2015. Stationed as the Head of the Public Art Division and housed within the Department of City Planning, he maintained the City's public art collection, developed plans and policies, and implemented new works of public art and programs, and was the staff person for the City's Art Commission. Morton is currently an independent art consultant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Resources

Public Art Management Tools

[Add Value Add Art](#)

[Administrative tools, budgets, contracts, and artist selection](#)

Technical Assistance

The Office of Public Art, www.publicartpittsburgh.org

Americans for the Arts, www.americansforthearts.org

Insurance/Fiscal sponsorship

Fractured Atlas, www.fracturedatlas.org

Paint

Nova Color Paint, www.novacolorpaint.com

Golden acrylic paint, www.goldenpaints.com

M. Graham, mgraham.com

Utrecht, www.utrechtart.com

Dick Blick, www.dickblick.com

Murals

Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, www.muralarts.org

SPARC, www.sparcinla.org

Pittsburgh Art Places, www.pittsburghartplaces.org

Chicago Public Art Group, www.chicagopublicartgroup.org



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Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council

810 Penn Avenue, Suite 600

Pittsburgh, PA 15222-3401

Tel: 412.391.2060

Fax: 412.394.4280

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