

A muralist talks about his career and what motivates his painting.

Narrator: José Curbelo is an urban muralist from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Together with his team of aspiring young artists, he creates murals in inner-city neighborhoods.

José Curbelo: I love working with people. I love doing my own thing, I love writing my own paycheck, and I like to be involved in the life of the . . . the community. Working on murals, you're at one place – at one street corner – for twelve, fourteen hours a day, and you see everything that goes on.

Narrator: José feels his murals can provide color and a sense of hope and pride in an environment that can sometimes be dull and boring.

José Curbelo: In my opinion, the murals are necessary to the life of a community, because ever since way back when – hundreds of thousands of years ago – people have expressed themselves in a public way. Whether for spiritual reasons or for political reasons, or just to be creative, people have expressed themselves on walls, and I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if . . . you know, people didn't write on caves . . . you know, thousands of years ago or write on subway trains in the seventies.

Narrator: José's interest in art began at an early age. At thirteen, he got involved in his first mural project. From then on, mural painting became a passion.

José Curbelo: It's something that comes from . . . from your heart and comes from your own creativity. That's the importance of it.

Narrator: After high school, with some friends, José started his own mural-painting business called "Creative Energy Murals." Shortly after that, he realized he needed to learn more about how to use his art as a positive force in the community, so he attended a special program in urban art at a college in California. Now he's back home, doing what he loves. José says that even though some of his friends make more money than he does, his job provides other compensations.

José Curbelo: I may not earn as much money as someone working for a corporation, but I think the rewards in what I get out of my job is . . . is worth way more than . . . than money. I enjoy just being out there doing something good, painting, making public space a little bit more beautiful and more human.

Narrator: Another enjoyable part of José's job is supervising and guiding the young people he has selected to be on his team.

José Curbelo: It's fun. It's fun. I like working with . . . uh . . . with kids. I'm just a kid myself. I mean, the workers who are working on the project now are about fourteen to eighteen, and I'm only twenty-two. It's like a friend, but you're kind of like a boss, too, and it's a fine line. So, I mean, you just have to make sure that . . . uh . . . that people stay focused and stay committed to what the project is, which is painting a mural.

Narrator: But there's more to the job of an urban artist than just painting pictures. For each project, a location has to be found, permission must be obtained, and someone must be convinced to provide financing.

José Curbelo: First, what we do is we go out looking for a wall, or maybe we already know the wall because we see it every day. And then we just sit down and plan and draw and figure out ideas for what we might do. Either the business owner will pay for it; otherwise, we have to go and find funding. So we have to write applications and write grants to different organizations – with the city and arts groups – for money. And so we're competing with other people, with other groups. And that's kind of hard sometimes. And then we just sit there and wait and hope that we get . . . uh . . . that we get the money, and sometimes it comes through and sometimes it doesn't. It's kind of like a big gamble. But once we have the money, then we can buy materials, and then we set a schedule of when people are going to work and what are we going to do. What I like doing is . . . uh . . . is organizing these projects, getting

everything together, and making sure that it happens in the best way possible. And then we just meet, and then we paint it. Each day it's something different. There's new problems and new situations that . . . that arise that you have to . . . you have to deal with and solve, so it's not the same old thing. Every single day is completely different. I like just beautifying where I live, you know, and just being able to drive by a place that you've painted and just have that . . . you know, that good feeling that . . . uh . . . you've helped do that. And I like the fact that somehow I'm passing something along to the kids.

Narrator: Thanks to the work of José and his team, some inner-city neighborhoods in Minneapolis are a little brighter. And residents there will be able to enjoy these colorful, inspiring murals for many years to come.