A MURAL—BEFORE.

HOW ARE MURALS MADE?

When you see a finished mural on a wall, you are looking at the result of a long process. There are many steps between the moment a mural is conceived and the day it is dedicated. These steps can vary somewhat, depending on how a mural is funded and where it will be located. Still, most murals go through the same general sequence, described below, which can take from three to six months or more.

The idea for a mural can come from any number of sources, but usually it comes from a community or a "funder." Sometimes the Mural Arts Program will notice a good wall in a neighborhood and seek out funding to put a mural there. Or, a City Council member or other public representative will request a mural in a particular district.

Since most of Philadelphia's murals are sponsored by foundations and corporations, a lot of the early work involves finding a good match between the funder and a community. Most funders do not have geographical preferences for the murals they sponsor, but they may have particular themes or subjects in mind. In this case, the Mural Arts staff tries to find a neighborhood that would like a mural with that theme. Other times, a community might have an idea for a mural, and the staff will try to find an appropriate funder.

There are other considerations that go into making a mural as well, such as ensuring that they are distributed equitably among the communities who want them. Because demand for murals far exceeds the available resources, the program recently initiated a community application process to help facilitate decision making.

STEP ONE

CHOOSING A WALL

The MAP staff visit the community where a mural has been requested to find an appropriate wall or to check out a wall that the community has identified. Murals need to be painted on surfaces that are free of major defects and water damage and that are relatively flat and smooth. And, of course, the wall should be located where passers-by can see it from a distance and in its entirety.

1 JANE, RIGHT, SCOUTS OUT A MURAL IN OLD CITY WITH MAP STAFFER ARIEL BIERBAUM AND A COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE.

Before a mural can proceed, the wall's owner must be contacted for permission. If there is an empty lot next to the wall, the Mural Arts staff will speak to that property owner as well, to determine whether there are any imminent plans to sell or develop it. Sometimes, these trash-filled vacant lots evolve into colorful community gardens.

STEP TWO

EXPLORING IDEAS

The MAP staff and mural artist meet with members of the community where a mural is planned to discuss possible themes and designs. Sometimes the community or funder has an idea in mind, and this is explored and developed. If no idea has been proposed, MAP staff will bring pictures of other murals or show a selection of artists' portfolios to get the group thinking.

2 LOCAL RESIDENTS DISCUSS POSSIBLE MURAL THEMES AT A COMMUNITY PLANNING MEETING.

STEP THREE

CREATING THE DESIGN

Once a theme is decided, the artist develops an initial design, which is presented to the group for feedback. If there is no organized group available to speak to, mural staff may go door to door showing residents a proposed design and getting their feedback. The artist then incorporates their input and works up more sketches until a final design is approved. A design may go through multiple versions before consensus is reached.

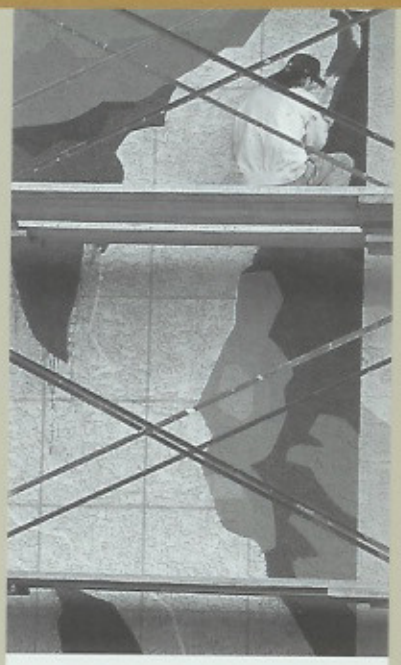
3 ANA URIBE GETS FEEDBACK FROM NEIGHBORS ON A PROPOSED MURAL DESIGN.

STEP FOUR

PREPARING THE WALL

The Mural Arts crew prepares the wall for painting. This process includes erecting the scaffolding and "buffing" or priming the wall by removing loose paint, filling holes, and applying a waterproof coat to protect the mural from any moisture that might seep through the wall. A clear acrylic coat is applied over the entire mural when it is finished to protect it from the elements.

4 A MEMBER OF THE MURAL ARTS CREW ASSEMBLES SCAFFOLDING.



5 DAVID MCSHANE USES A GRID TO HELP HIM TRANSFER HIS MURAL DESIGN TO THE WALL.

STEP FIVE

TRANSFERRING THE DESIGN TO THE WALL

The most commonly used technique for transferring a design to a wall is the grid method. First, the artist superimposes a series of horizontal and vertical lines over the final sketch, breaking the composition down into a pattern of small squares. A similar pattern of squares is created on the blank wall. Each square on the wall is directly proportional to each one on the sketch; for example, one square inch of the sketch equals one square foot of the mural. The artist then reproduces the contents of each square on the sketch in the corresponding square on the wall until the entire composition has been re-created in larger scale. The process is somewhat like painting by numbers, only on a much larger scale.

STEP SIX

PAINTING THE MURAL

Most mural artists prefer to work directly on the wall, dealing with the unique challenges of each surface as they go along. Sometimes there are chimneys, ledges, or windows to work around. Sometimes there are deformities that need to be compensated for by adjusting the composition or varying the paint coverage.

Because of their particular style or the scale of the mural, artists may choose to paint the mural on synthetic fabric—once parachute cloth, now more commonly a thin, felt-like material similar to that used in fabric softener sheets. Using a slide projector or other transfer method, they re-create the design on fabric panels in their studios. When the panels are finished, they are adhered to the mural wall using acrylic gel.

6 LARISSA PRESTON SWABS ACRYLIC GEL ON THE BACK OF A MURAL PANEL BEFORE ADHERING IT TO THE WALL.

While this technique offers many advantages in terms of greater control and durability, it is expensive and requires artists to spend more time in their studios, away from the noise and commotion of the street and out of contact with the public. For this reason, most artists still choose to do it the old-fashioned way, trading convenience for the surprises, challenges, and satisfactions that come with exposure to the weather and being a part of the community.

7 A DANCE BY LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HIGHLIGHTS A MURAL DEDICATION.

STEP SEVEN

TURNING THE MURAL OVER TO THE COMMUNITY

The last step in the making of a mural is the dedication—the moment when the mural is transferred from the hands of the artist to the hands of the community. These are festive events, often accompanied by music, food, performances, and poetry readings, as well as remarks from the artists, members of the community, city officials, and MAP staff.

A MURAL—IN PROGRESS.

chapter 1

"COOL JANE"

PRECEDING PAGES NATIONALLY RENOWNED FIGURE PAINTER SIDNEY GOODMAN LENT ONE OF HIS IMAGES, AS WELL AS HIS TALENTS, TO THE MAKING OF *BOY WITH RAISED ARM*, 40TH STREET AND POWELTON AVENUE. THE MURAL INSPIRED PASSERSBY FOR TEN YEARS UNTIL ITS BUILDING WAS RAZED IN 2002 TO MAKE WAY FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION. MAP IS NEGOTIATING TO RE-CREATE THE MURAL ON THE NEW BUILDING GOING UP ON THE SITE.

In June of 1984, Jane Golden, a young muralist from Margate, New Jersey, by way of California, brought her talents to the streets of Philadelphia to head up what was then envisioned as a modest six-week youth program within Mayor Wilson Goode's brand new Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network. Back then, those who conceived the program could not have imagined how it would grow, under the unflagging energy and determination of one woman, into one of the most prolific and innovative public art programs in the country.

Today, Jane and the more than two thousand murals painted under her program's direction have become an enduring part of the Philadelphia scenery, adding a new dimension to the city's character and bringing inspiration and hope to some of its ailing neighborhoods.

Murals: Where do they come from, where do they go?

Mural painting has its roots deep in human history. Beginning with the earliest cave paintings, drawing on walls has been a compelling form of public expression, helping us capture and remember important community experiences.

Because of their intrinsic bond to architecture and the relative ease of making them, murals are among the most accessible of all public art forms. As such, they have been used over the years for a multitude of purposes: to convey the official values of government and religion, to give voice to the unempowered, and to commemorate important historic or civic events. They also have filled a purely aesthetic function, serving the public's need for art that simply pleases the eye through color and form.

In the United States of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most architectural murals were government commissioned and made by officially sanctioned artists. Today's murals, however, generally derive their authority from another source—the public will. For example, the subject matter for many of Philadelphia's murals arises directly out of dialogues with

neighborhood residents. The murals' themes and symbols, even their aesthetic, reflect the concerns and character of the communities for which they are created. This grassroots genesis is both a strength and a vulnerability: Contemporary murals achieve an immediacy and relevance untouched by other forms of public art, but they are also more vulnerable to change.

Just as the symbolism of some historic artworks may seem baffling today and their styles overwrought, so too, contemporary urban murals occasionally lose relevance over time. Sometimes the dominant religious or ethnic character of a neighborhood changes. A theme that was meaningful for one group may not have the same significance for new residents. Sometimes a mural's visual style doesn't wear well. Natural selection kicks in. After fifteen to twenty years, a mural will begin to deteriorate and fade away unless there is active interest in preserving it.

MAP does all it can to preserve Philadelphia's best murals (including some painted before the city mural program began), but through lack of money, lack of interest, or the decisions of property owners, a number are lost each year.

THE USE OF ALLEGORY TO COMMUNICATE COMPLEX THEMES IS STILL A POPULAR MURAL DEVICE. IN *COLORS OF LIGHT*, LOCATED AT 12TH AND VINE STREETS IN CHINATOWN, ARTIST JOSH SARANTITIS HAS USED AN ANCIENT SCROLL, A DRAGON, CHILDREN, AND A WOMAN'S FACE LOOKING OUTWARD TO DEPICT THE CONTINUOUS FLOW OF ASIAN HERITAGE FROM THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE.

A legacy of murals

Philadelphia's murals draw on a long legacy, not only in their commemoration of shared events and experiences but also in their specific themes. In particular, popular genres of nineteenth- and twentieth-century public painting live on in contemporary murals.

The most ambitious and esteemed category of nineteenth-century painting was "history painting"—the heroic depiction of uplifting and inspiring narratives. In Europe and the United States, these mural-size paintings were a favorite form of wholesome public entertainment, and the successful ones toured from city to city accompanied by explanatory literature. They inspired sermons and debates, just as many of today's murals do. A good example is Benjamin West's apocalyptic historical allegory, *Death on the Pale Horse* (1817, see below). When it was shown in London and later at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where it is still a central exhibit, it was viewed by a vast and enthusiastic audience.

MANY CONTEMPORARY MURALS FOCUS ON HEROIC OR HISTORICAL THEMES, SHARING ROOTS WITH SUCH POPULAR NINETEENTH CENTURY ALLEGORICAL PAINTINGS AS *DEATH ON THE PALE HORSE* BY BENJAMIN WEST.

A contemporary example of allegorical painting is Josh Sarantitis's *Colors of Light: Gateway to Chinatown* (12th and Vine Streets, 2000, see p. 21), which symbolically depicts new generations carrying Chinese heritage and values into the future. The different parts of the composition are united by a colorful dragon, ruler of heaven and a symbol of power and fortune. The dragon's body weaves in and out of the boundaries of the wall assisted by attached wooden supports that enable the painted image to extend into the air. The mural was dedicated in 2000, the year of the dragon.

There are also numerous precedents for today's murals that examine and celebrate aspects of community history. In her book, *Public Art in Philadelphia*, Penny Bach notes that during the Great Depression, Robert E. Larter was asked to paint a subject of local Philadelphia history for his 1938 mural, *Iron Plantation Near Southwark, 1800*, commissioned by the Treasury Department Section of Fine Arts for the Southwark Post Office.

A prized local example of the regional landscape genre—an enduring, worldwide mural theme—is *The Dream Garden* (6th and Walnut Streets, see next page). Designed by Philadelphia graphic artist and muralist Maxfield Parrish and executed as a mosaic by Louis Comfort Tiffany in 1916, this idyllic scene still decorates the beautiful lobby of the Curtis Building (former home of the offices of the publisher of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies Home Journal*). *The Dream Garden* was designed as the centerpiece of a public area that includes a fountain and seating.

THE DREAM GARDEN, DESIGNED BY MAXFIELD PARRISH AND CRAFTED BY LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY IN 1916, IS AN HISTORIC EXAMPLE OF HOW MURALS CAN ENLIVEN AND ENRICH THEIR SURROUNDINGS. IT IS LOCATED AT 6TH AND WALNUT STREETS IN THE CURTIS BUILDING.

Similarly, outdoor murals often serve as integral components of larger environments. A community garden in the North Kensington section of Philadelphia offers walkways, flowers, and a cool blue vista of mountains and lake as a respite from the surrounding expanse of barren city blocks. Another example of a mural that successfully merges with its environment is Tish Ingersoll's luminous *Tuscan Landscape* (32nd and Spring Garden Streets, 1994, see p. 24), which seems to effortlessly embrace its surroundings, including the homeowner's hammock, in a panorama of golden light, its Italian arcade, and receding hills.

Today, MAP receives frequent requests for murals that depict historical scenes significant to the community. Puerto Rican residents of Norris Square wanted images from the history of Puerto Rico to teach their children about their cultural origins. The mural that was painted there is now known locally as *Raices* (Roots, see p. 70). Another mural in the Strawberry Mansion section of the city entitled *Black American Gothic* (Jane Golden, 21st and York Streets, 1990, see p. 139) recalls the rural southern background of many of that neighborhood's elders as a reminder to the younger residents growing up in an urban environment.

Artist Michael Webb was asked to come up with a theme related to Philadelphia's history for the untitled mural on the Beasley Building in Center City (12th and Walnut Streets, 1997, see p. 25). Determined to avoid what he calls a "cliché about [Benjamin] Franklin and Betsy Ross," Webb created instead an elaborate scene of modern-day workers designing and constructing a building that alludes to the city's past, including a vignette that relates to the casting of Alexander Milne Calder's gigantic statue of William Penn, which tops City Hall.

Following a long artistic tradition, portraits of real people are often incorporated into today's murals, heightening their significance to the community. The majority of these portraits are of local citizens—community leaders, residents, or neighborhood children who are singled out for special tribute or just as models. To create their two murals celebrating

TISH INGERSOLL'S *TUSCAN LANDSCAPE*, AT 32ND AND SPRING GARDEN STREETS, FITS COMFORTABLY INTO ITS URBAN SURROUNDINGS, EMBRACING EVEN THE HOMEOWNER'S HAMMOCK.

the annual *Black Family Reunion* (40th Street and Girard Avenue, 1988; 20th and Watkins Streets, 1993). Jane Golden and Dietrich Adonis borrowed images from residents' family photograph albums. The *Casa di Pazzo* mural in South Philadelphia (12th and Federal Streets, 1999), painted by David Guinn and Barbara Smolen, is based on treasured vintage photographs of people who grew up together in the neighborhood and now belong to the same social club.

Other murals celebrate native sons and daughters who have achieved public fame or made a significant contribution to the community. They include musical entertainers such as *Mario Lanza* (Diane Keller, Broad and Reed Streets, 1997, see p. 102), and Marian Anderson and the Heath Brothers in *People of Point Breeze* (David McShane, 1541 S. 22nd Street, 1998, see p. 26); famous athletes such as *Jackie Robinson* (David McShane, 2803 N. Broad Street, 1997, see p. 129); and *Wilt Chamberlain* (John Lewis, 1234 Vine Street, 2001). Social activists and political figures are also honored, including *Roxanne Jones* (William Freeman, Broad and Clearfield Streets, 1997, repainted by Peter Pagast in 2000), the first black woman to serve in Pennsylvania's state legislature. Jones was a staunch advocate for Philadelphia's disenfranchised. Pagast also painted the portrait of activist entertainer *Paul Robeson* (4502 Chestnut Street, 1999, see p. 35).

Allegories speak to our moral and spiritual aspirations. Beautiful landscapes satisfy our longing for a moment of peace in hectic urban surroundings. Historical scenes remind us of our journeys and why we are what we are today. And portraits, whether formal tributes to eminent individuals or informal likenesses of our neighbors, help to show us who we are, even as we grow and change. In these ways and many others, murals offer us a wide range of perspectives—on the world around us and into ourselves.

Urban problems—urban outreach

Philadelphia's contemporary mural movement began in the 1970s, when artists Don Kaiser and Clarence Wood became coordinators of the Environmental Art Program for the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Urban Outreach Department and began to include community murals among their many activities. Inaugurated by David Katzive and continued under the leadership of Penny Bach, the program received international recognition in 1972 when one of its murals, thought at that time to be the largest ever, appeared on the cover of *Paris Match*. Designed by Washington Color School artist Gene Davis, *Franklin's Footpath* consisted of eighty different colored stripes, each 11 inches wide and 414 feet long. The mural was painted directly on the street, covering a large section of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in front of the art museum.

By the time the Environmental Art Program ended in 1983, Kaiser and Wood had painted more than one hundred walls in Philadelphia neighborhoods. Their work included jungle waterfalls, various compositions incorporating portraits of local children, and even enlargements of children's dinosaur drawings for a school on Lancaster Avenue.

INCORPORATING ELEMENTS FROM MANY OF THE CITY'S BEST-KNOWN MONUMENTS, THIS UNTITLED MURAL BY MICHAEL WEBB AT 12TH AND WALNUT STREETS CELEBRATES PHILADELPHIA'S ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY USING THE ALLEGORY OF AN IMAGINARY BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION.