

# 'It's Not Just Some Cheesy Mural'

*The history of the universe, from the Big Bang to modern life in Los Angeles, is being told in a space 540 feet long on a retaining wall next to Belmont High School near downtown. The huge painting is the largest single-concept mural in L.A. and covers a previously graffiti-scarred concrete expanse.*

*The cost when completed will be between \$25,000 and \$30,000, with \$10,000 from private sources and the rest from Proposition A, the 1992 parkland and urban parks ballot initiative.*

*The mural, the final phase of a larger neighborhood cleanup, was organized by the Hollywood Beautification Team and executed by ARTScorpsLA. The painting was done by a team mixing traditionally schooled artists, spray-can artists and a number of short-term volunteers, including Belmont students. JAMES BLAIR spoke with artists and organizers of the mural project about how the painting has affected the neighborhood and the larger purposes of public art.*

## EVA S. COCKCROFT

*Professional muralist and lead artist, Venice*

I saw the wall and it reminded me of the movie "The Horse's Mouth," where the painter, played by Alec Guinness, sees a battleship steaming by and exclaims, "What a wall!"

This is the biggest wall I ever contemplated doing and I've done some big walls. It was so big that nothing less than the history of the universe was an appropriate subject. The title of it is "Earth Memory."

As lead artist, I organize the work schedule, seeing that people are busy at what they can do best. And I also work as an artist—I've done lots of painting.

From right to left you see a ray of light that turns into the Big Bang and from that the formation of the planets and on through the history of evolution until we move into the final two sections to the emergence of man. If you look at history from a universal scale, we actually overdid the role that man plays, but we're partisan and, because we're artists, our early man is a cave painter. We decided to focus on North America as a specific region and end up right here in California.

We get lots of support. People come by and bring us sodas, stuff like that, and say,

"We love it. You're doing such a good job. You're really brightening up the neighborhood. You're making this really beautiful and we like the way you're doing it. Keep it up."

Public art in general gives a neighborhood an identity, creates beauty and something for people to see as they walk by. In this case it's sort of fun and educational. It's not a terribly serious mural. It doesn't have any political content, although some people might consider evolution to be a political statement. But we consider it just the kind of science that's taught in the schools in the United States. What I like to see is public art that relates to the people in the community, that is something they want and they understand.

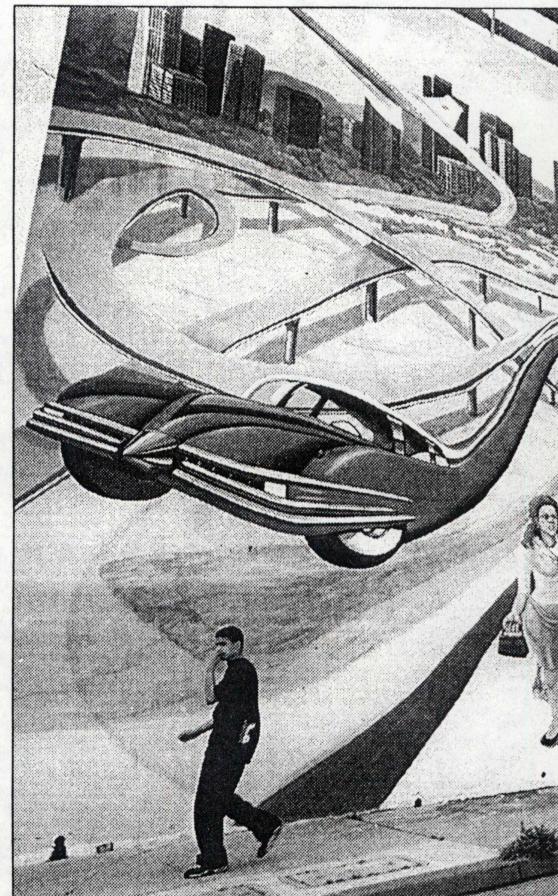


Eva Cockcroft with muralist's tools.

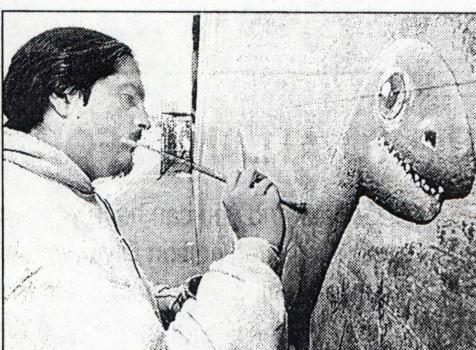
## JAIME REYES

*Spray-can artist, Monterey Park*

I started working for ARTScorpsLA last summer for [a project] at Hollywood High. This is definitely the biggest project I've ever worked on. It gives thought and imagination and really livens up the place. The spray can is a lot quicker



The mural, 540 feet long, is only three feet tall



Jaime Reyes touches up a dinosaur.

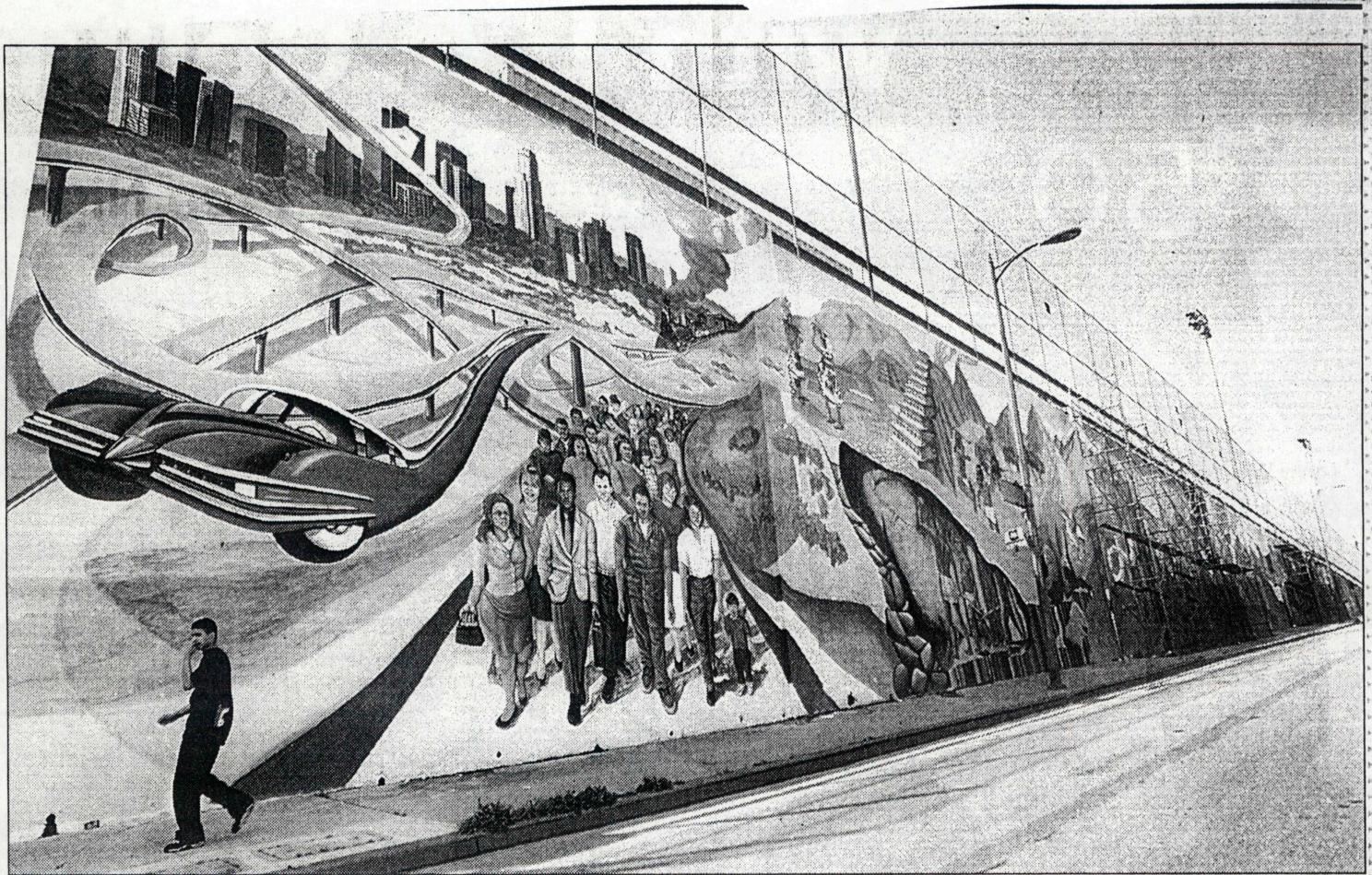
than the brush and gives a lot cleaner look, but I've used both spray can and brush [on this mural].

There's no limit to how good you can get with mural painting and I hope to be the best I can be—to give something back to the community.

I've been interested in art since I was a kid. I felt the spray can was so much more challenging than the brush. Without "graffiti" art I might be in a gang. It's given me a choice.

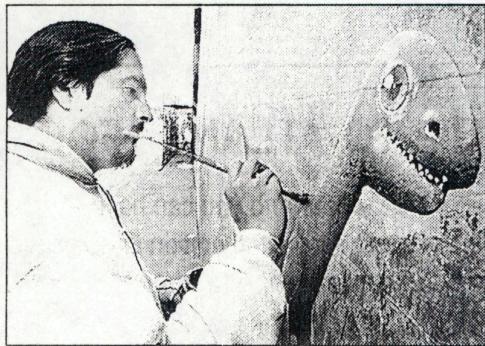
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Photos by JONATHAN ALCORN / For the Times

The mural, 540 feet long, is only three feet tall at the top of the hill on Beverly Boulevard, but 40 feet tall at the bottom (left).



Jaime Reyes touches up a dinosaur.

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not just some cheesy mural.

#### MIKE HERNANDEZ

*Los Angeles City Council; represents area around Belmont High*

We started a process around Belmont High School because of the crime activity, including gang members shooting people [near the school]. The process included tree plantings, cleanups, the city purchasing some [housing] units that were problem sites. And it also included a whole community coming together to deal with the issues. That partnership included government and the private sector, and this mural is the last piece. It's going to be something of pride.

#### AUGUSTINE HERRERA

*Principal, Belmont High School*

Our concerns certainly were met and we felt that they were very sensitive about the fact that this was a multicultural community and there would be very many different points of view.

People whose businesses are across the street on the north side of Beverly

Boulevard have written to us giving us their positive input. Now they look out across the street and the mural has given them a really positive feeling toward our school.

Our students are just overwhelmed by this. They think it's massive. They've taken care of it. There's been no vandalism in the entire six months that they've been working on this thing. They've never had to go back and redo a part. My sense of it is that whenever a community finds something that's important to them, they take care of it.

#### TRINNETTE SCOTT

*17, junior, Belmont High School*

I personally feel that the mural is very beautiful, and not only does it make a statement of our past and our future and the present but it also beautifies our environment; and I feel that it's about time we have something like that—something so beautiful in our environment other than graffiti. Me and my friends all feel that it's something positive and very beautiful. [I'd like to see more public art like that], especially in our environment—something to look forward to.