

SPARC

Continued from D3

Kamlager hopes to have the mural hung by mid-December. The \$30,000 cost to produce the mural is coming from a city contract.

"We hope the mural will convey the spirit and professionalism that our members have regarding their jobs," Monkawa said.

Only a digital mural is feasible for Local 11 because "our wall is in such bad need of repair that there would have to be major surface work in order to accommodate a

would want. The Macs support for PostScript, Adobe's ubiquitous page-description language, puts NT to shame. In publishing, error-free PostScript processing is the coin of the realm.

• Speed. I'm still waiting on independent testing comparing the new G3 Macs with fast NT boxes,

mural that's painted on," Monkawa said. Besides, he said, a digitally produced mural could be moved or replaced should the union change offices. He is even thinking about shrinking the final image to have it printed on postcards and T-shirts.

Kamlager and Baca say they may adopt some of those digitally in-

ill-defined or poorly executed strategy to another, the Mac still dominates publishing. The industry can change rapidly, of course. But if Apple can win anywhere, it will win in publishing.

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spired marketing ideas for SPARC.

"How do arts organizations survive for the 21st century?" Baca said. "They go into business."

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current Pentium-based Windows system or Power Macintosh, a low-cost video camera, a high-speed data connection, the right software and someone else somewhere with similar setup, you have everything you need for two-way video communication.

At the Comdex computer show last month, I had a chance to look some of the latest software and hardware that's attempting to make two-way video communication common as the standard telephone. There are plenty of companies playing this game, but they're most having a tough time.

Desktop hardware isn't the problem, at least in terms of cost. Y

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CULTURE

Paint It Ain't

■ Art: In digital murals the Social and Public Art Resource Center sees a medium offering several advantages over the traditional form.

By KAREN KAPLAN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Using photographs of a chef and a bellhop in combination with historical pictures from labor demonstrations, Judith Baca and Patrick Blasa are creating a collage featuring hotel and restaurant workers in Los Angeles.

Altogether, Baca and Blasa will spend 2½ months blending the images using computer programs such as Photoshop and Illustrator.

And they'd better get it exactly right, because when they're done, they'll have a mural 39 feet wide and 20 feet tall that will cover the exterior of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union Local 11 office in downtown Los Angeles.

Such high-visibility projects are nothing new for the Social and Public Art Resource Center, the Venice organization creating the mural. But after two decades of making and preserving murals with paints and brushes, SPARC has embraced the digital art-making process.

"The painted image has the capacity for us to do much more imagining, but the digital image can tell the historical record," said Baca, a SPARC founder who now serves as artistic director. "We can use authentic materials, and we can put murals in places we could never paint."

Those are just some of the advantages Baca and her SPARC colleagues see in digital murals, which are created with off-the-shelf computer graphics software and then printed at high resolution onto plexiglass, vinyl, aluminum sheets, ceramic tiles or other materials by outside specialists. Digital murals are also cheaper to produce, repair and replace, and they can be created four times faster than murals made with paint.

"The mural-making process is the same," said Sydney Kamlager, SPARC's enthusiastic community public art director. "What we're changing is the medium."

Baca borrowed the digital idea from billboard companies, which also produce large images and display them in public places. The SPARC Digital Mural Lab's first creation, in the summer of 1996, was a series of six pictures for the Cornerstone Theatre play called "Birthday of the Century." Using historical images, the murals highlighted the legacies of six ethnic communities in California.

That was followed by another six-picture installation at the Estrada Courts Housing Development complex in East Los Angeles. Those murals blended photos from the residents' pasts with pictures of the present and images symbolizing their dreams for the future.

At SPARC, Baca and Kamlager are hoping the digital murals will help them realize their dream for a self-sufficient community arts organization. Today, most of SPARC's money comes from foundation grants and the city of Los Angeles' Cultural Affairs Department, under the Mural Maintenance and Inventory Program. Some funding comes from corporations, commissions and individual donations. But with public support for the arts on the decline, Kamlager is creating a new business model in which digital murals play a major role.

Last year, SPARC won a three-year, \$300,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to adopt technology to help the organization generate more revenue. Digital murals offer far more art per dollar, which will make it easier for SPARC



Photos by IRIS SCHNEIDER / Los Angeles Times



Muralist Judith Baca, artist director of SPARC, in front of the digital mural "Arnold's Brother," above. At left, Baca and Sydney Kamlager, the group's community public art director, with some of their projects.

to win commissions from corporations, universities and arts organizations, she said. (A portion of those commissions can be set aside to fund murals in public places.) The digital images can also be printed on paper and sold to raise additional funds.

From an artistic point of view, what really excites Baca is the ability to incorporate "source materials" into digital murals. In a mural for the Mark Taper Forum in downtown Los Angeles, for example, Baca combined a series of pictures from past productions with photos of the stage, a picture of the ancient theater at Delphi and the scanned-in image of the Taper's 1977 Tony Award.

"The technology aspect is easy," said Blasa, SPARC's new production manager. "The hard part is getting the visual elements together and to do the community coordination."

Community input is critical for SPARC's murals. For the labor union project, SPARC staff interviewed a wide range of union members about themes that could be presented in the mural, said David Monkawa, a union shop steward. Then they searched through the union's photo archive for images of boycotts and marches and took additional photos to create portraits of today's union members.

Baca and Blasa are using three Apple Power PCs and two scanners to combine the array of images. When they're done, they will save the file to a compact disc and bring it to a printer such as *Mega Grafx* in Culver City, where the image will be printed backward on specially coated paper at up to 300 dots-per-square-inch. Then the image will be heat-transferred to vinyl mesh material like a giant iron-on.

Please see SPARC, I