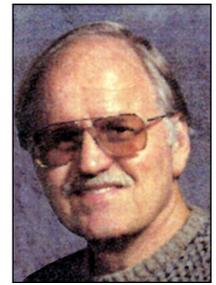


What an artist needs when an artist comes to do a mural in a town.

By Roger Cooke



1. An artist needs plenty of lead time, preferably six months, in order to negotiate a contract and work within the committee's budget, talk ideas, do research, have creative time, do roughs and get changes made on roughs, then do a comprehensive painting to work from when doing the big painting.
2. Although the mural committee's we've worked with are always good for their word, an artist should not be expected to begin before a contract is signed, not even with the rough ideas.
3. It helps if a town can supply as much historical reference on the chosen subject as possible.
4. It helps to have several walls lined up that can be used, and several different historic subject ideas lined up. There have been times when a wall was no longer available, for whatever reason, and if there is not another wall lined up, it can set a program back a year.
5. It helps if the mural is not delayed by funding problems, but if they are, it helps an artist to have speedy communication with only one person on the committee.
6. To help the artist know how to budget his costs, if mural committees can supply an artist a place to stay, such as an unused extra room at one of the committee member's home or an empty duplex, or a donated motel room, this helps the artist lower his expenses. This also has a double benefit of relationship building between an artist and mural committee. Also a means to lower an artists' expenses is if an artist is from out of town, a committee member may have air miles to donate that would lower the mural cost, or supplying transportation for the artist while working on the mural can help, even if it is an old car or a bicycle. One nice thing one town did was to have a group of local restaurants donate meal coupons to the artist, which could be used for lunch or dinner.
7. Support supplies should be available, such as scaffolding, projector, power, electric extension cords, water, a restroom, and paints. The artist usually supplies their own brushes, since many artists are particular about what kind of brushes they use.
8. One person (the same person each time) on the mural committee should be available to check on the artist, and have a phone number where he or she can be reached in case serious problems arise.
9. It is a good idea to supply the artist with an overall picture of the wall, as well as a close up shot of the texture of the wall. It can be disconcerting for an artist to arrive at a wall and discover there are major problems that need to be dealt with, or a surface he hadn't expected, some of which may take extra days of work.
10. Fortunate is the committee who has a volunteer who prepares the wall in advance with wall sealers and primer. If the committee expects the artist to do that, then it should be part of the contract and extra days will be needed.
11. Lining up publicity from the local news media during the painting process is good for both the mural program and the artist. A dedication ceremony the day the mural is complete with a word from the committee President and the artist with refreshments on site is a nice way to invite community involvement.
12. The mural committee should communicate to the artist when the optimum weather will be in that particular area, and avoid seasons when there may be excessive rain or extreme temperatures. This is another reason why the artist needs plenty of lead time, so that they do not get pushed to finish a wall when the pigeons are ice skating, or working in 108 degree temperatures when my breakfast eggs could be cooked on the sidewalk (I have had to do both).
13. It is important for a committee to do research before they prepare a wall for an artist, so the wall will last as long as possible. This includes a rain gutter or some kind of rain protection after the mural is on the wall. Not doing proper research has resulted in more than one wall flaking off and falling on the sidewalk.
14. The committee should keep accurate records of every phase of a mural process, such as what and whom they used for wall preparation, what kinds of paint they used on the mural, and what kind of clear coat they may have used on top of the mural. If the mural has to be repaired later, this information is crucial. Having a record of the discussions with the mural artist, and his agreements, and if he was good to work with are essential. Also, a record of the dedication ceremony and who needed to be invited. If there are any comments from people who really like the mural, they could be included in a file of interested individuals with name, phone number, e-mail, etc. This helps the artist if someone comes around later and wants to contact the artist personally. If people on the mural committee are replaced by new folks, the new people need to know where to access this information.