



Active participation in the art process

Volcanoes spew molten lava; swift waters flood a barren plain; moist clouds ascend after depositing their dense loads. The creation of the earth? No — just some of the natural phenomena portrayed in a mural being painted at Whiteaker Elementary School in west Eugene.

The large twelve by twenty-seven foot mural is one of several designed for the school by University painting instructor Thomas Cappuccio. The murals are intended to expose the students to art and the art process through active observation and participation. Cappuccio learned of Whiteaker principal Walt Burgess' desire for art in his school through Barbara West, a District 4-J school board member. After contacting Burgess, he obtained approval from the school board and received funding for the project through the Office of Scientific and Scholarly Research at the University. The funding provided for several works — one large exterior mural and five or more smaller murals indoors.

Cappuccio chose earth environments as subject matter for the large mural. The environments are presented in a multiplicity of views which encourage an eye movement around the work and back into its various depths, a view of the earth as a living, changing entity, and the participation of the viewer in the three dimensional activity of the mural.

Only one work has been completed. It is a football action piece which will be placed over the center section of a long, narrow hall. Although football may not seem to be an appropriate topic for an elementary school, Cappuccio explains that the sportsmen are used to aid movement down the hall.

The subject matter for the other murals has not yet been determined. Cappuccio is considering plant and animal themes which will be both colorful, educational, and perhaps emphasize historical species transitions. The last of the five murals could prove to be the most interesting. It is one which will actively involve the students. Here Cappuccio will define the outline of the work, and the elementary students themselves will paint directly on the wall.

Cappuccio is not doing the painting of the murals himself. He has hired two University students, Pat McGill and Bruce Millette, to execute his designs. McGill is completing his Bachelor of Fine Arts

degree and Millette is finishing his Masters degree in Art Education. Both are painters and are concerned with landscape themes in their own art.

To create the murals, McGill and Millette enlarge a color sketch furnished by Cappuccio with an opaque projector. The composition is drawn in pencil and then painted. The final product is not a strict copy of the Cappuccio model, however, for both are allowed to interpret the sketches while remaining within the general framework of Cappuccio's portrayal of the subject. Cappuccio explains that he would like to see the sketches improved during their execution by the artists.

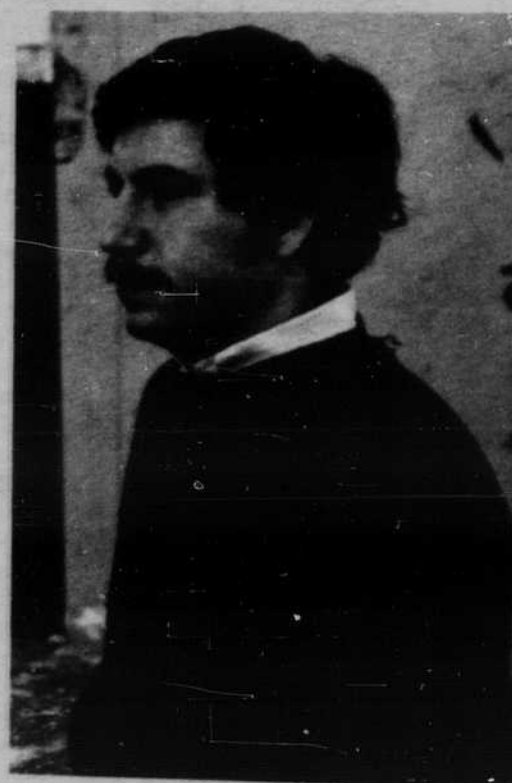
McGill and Millette admit that because of the nature of their tasks, they feel like sign painters. They have enjoyed the freedom of interpretation given them. There is much room for such interpretation, for when a twelve by twenty-seven inch sketch is enlarged into a twelve by twenty-seven foot painting, detail must be left largely to the painters.

The murals have been designed to be mobile. The interior murals are painted on canvas so that although they are attached to the building, they are not painted on the wall surface. The huge exterior mural is painted on treated plywood panels, which can be disassembled and moved to another site. The exterior work, in fact, is under production in the school cafeteria and will be disassembled and moved outside upon completion. Mobility was a consideration in the painting of the murals because of the age of Whiteaker School. The school is old and there is no assurance that it will operate too long into the future. In the event of its closure, all of the murals, except those done by the students, will be moved. The student murals will not be lost, however, since Cappuccio is considering encouraging students to paint over them periodically. In this way, students who are attending the school will always be able to relate to the art product and the art experience.

The production of the works fulfills a long-standing desire of Whiteaker principal Walt Burgess. When he assumed administration of the school nine years ago, he hoped that the green, windowless halls of the building could be filled with colorful art work. After several attempts to bring art to the school, Burgess had

almost given up. He busied himself with physical improvements that he could accomplish which would make the old school more liveable. The halls were painted in light shades of yellow and maroon. Light colors were added to the gymnasium, the cafeteria, and the main office. As a result, the building was more than a few shades brighter than it had been but it still lacked colorful art work.

Tom Cappuccio has long been involved in mural work. His interest in large scale art began years ago when he worked on stage sets. Later he produced art for New York store window displays and completed some murals for public buildings in the east. More recently, he painted a mural for the Springfield Public Library.



Cappuccio

Cappuccio believes that public art gives a city an identity and provides a point of interest about which people may gather. Whether or not the public likes the work, it nevertheless becomes an attraction. The murals at Whiteaker School have the potential to be both top quality art work and objects of popular identity.

Anthony Radich

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Thursday, April 19, 1973