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# Blackboards of the People

Colorful murals liven the humdrum urban landscapes of Eugene and Springfield

Eugene is a city where a diversity of cultures and influences have blended into a unique whole. Tie-dyes have become normal casual wear; businessmen sign petitions to legalize marijuana; "hippy" handicrafts have become part of the mainstream economy.

And a wasteland of modern buildings have been enlivened with artistic imagination, their expansive pale walls painted with colorful murals.

Far from being just faded remnants of a '60s counter-culture, many of the paintings are new.

Murals adorn everything from staid businesses to elementary schools.

Many of the creations can be seen in downtown Eugene. Polka-dotted dinosaurs, poppy fields and smiling Hoe-dads cast an air of gaiety over the city streets.

Many of the downtown murals bear the mysterious signature of Kiki. Jerry Winetrot of Maaco Auto Body remembers Kiki as a local artist looking for a path to recognition in the early '70s. She would find inviting walls and offer to paint murals on them for the cost of the materials.

The result for Maaco is a cartoon-like rendition of what goes on inside the building: a smashed-up car enters one end and comes out the other as shiny and absurd as anything Dr. Seuss could dream up. All, of course, under the scrutiny of a purple dog on a unicycle.

Even the less eccentric community of Springfield sports its share of wall art. One of the older murals, the dancing milk bottles and Omar Khayyam sky of the Springfield Creamery, dates back to 1970. Erin Sullivan, a Eugene artist and astrologer, received free milk delivery for a year as payment for her artistic energies.

Sue Kesey, long-time employee of the Creamery, remembers community reaction when the mural was painted. "Springfield thought we were pretty atrocious when we put it in," she notes, however, that new murals are being painted in downtown Springfield — 16 years after Sullivan's creation was met with such criticism.

Now that the Creamery has moved, there is little chance that the mural will survive. "I wish I could figure how to take the wall with us," laments Kesey. She says the new building is out on Airport Road and is less inviting to an artist's brush.

Closer to campus, the Council for Human Rights in Latin America smiles out toward the University with its friendly mural faces. According to Nelly Macon Link of CHRLA, this mural is more than a sign or artistic whim. Link says that, in Latin America, murals are the "blackboards of the people," reflecting the hopes

and desires of the people. The creation of a mural becomes a community project. Link says; there is a fiesta atmosphere and everyone joins in putting the bright pigments on the walls. While canvasses become entombed in parlors and galleries, the murals are forms of art that can be shared by everyone.

The Kincaid Street mural was painted by Chilean artist Pancho Lietelier. His father, Chilean ambassador Orlando Lietelier, was assassinated in a car bomb explosion in Washington, D.C. Pancho Lietelier believed that by bringing murals to the United States he could tell the North American people what was happening to his people in Chile.

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CHRLA soon will be moving its

offices and, like the Springfield Creamery, leaving its mural to the whims of future occupants. Link says it is likely that the mural will be whitewashed when they leave, but she doesn't mourn its passing. Although it will be sad to see a "boring" plain wall, she says that whitewash is another part of Latin American tradition. Murals are transitory, reflecting moods, being whitewashed and leaving a wall for another depiction.

Next door stands the University Bookstore, its vast expanse of white cinderblocks begging for the life an artist can bring to it.

Story by  
Alyson Simmons

Photos by  
Bobbie Lo

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