

art

Women Who Make History (and the Women Who Paint Them)

Mural spotlights diverse communities

by Tony LeTigre

The 1,250-square-foot Women Making History in Portland mural honors the life and work of 28 women, all living, who have contributed in diverse ways to the enrichment of the city's community and culture. It is located on the north-facing wall of a warehouse at 2335 N. Interstate Ave.

Robin Corbo, a Santa Fe, Calif., native who designed a similar-sized mural last year for the Community Cycling Center on Northeast Alberta Street, was the key force in realizing the project. She conceived and designed it, solicited community advice on which women to honor and supervised the painting and unveiling of the final product.

"Organizing the mural took a lot longer than painting it," says Corbo, who is queer.

And she didn't do it alone. Her assistant artists were Emily Lux, Jason Greene and Sherri Love. Mark Meltzer prepared the wall for the mural by washing and speckling it prior to painting. Cara Buchalter provided the mural's calligraphic lettering. The actual painting was done by Corbo and a team of about 60 volunteers.

The mural design was a collaborative effort between metro-area nonprofits and historians who were asked to nominate women

from their communities whom they felt have made a significant impact on Portland from the grassroots level. Participants included The Urban League, Sisters in Action for Power, Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement, Native American Youth and Family Center, Black United Fund of Oregon and Cambodian American Community of Oregon.

Among the women represented in the mural are Basic Rights Oregon development director Jeana Frazzini and her partner, K.D. Parman, with whom she raises two sons. The pair made headlines last summer for winning a lawsuit in Multnomah County Circuit Court that sprang from the couple's indignation that the state unfairly forced them, as a same-sex couple, to pursue a "second-parent adoption" of their son Emmett, conceived through artificial insemination.

Also featured in the mural is Amara Pérez, co-director of In Other Words Women's Books and Resources. She replaced Sue Burns, who Corbo describes as "a major participant during the planning phase of the project."

Pérez says she became aware of the mural when Corbo approached In Other Words for sponsorship. She was delighted to be nominated for representation in the project and appeared as a speaker at the unveiling event Oct. 27.

"It was a nice turnout, and it was great to see so much leadership



Community members celebrate the unveiling of the Women Making History in Portland mural Oct. 27.

from women and in so many different ways," says Pérez, who is a lesbian. "Some women are doing community organizing, while others are doing service work, advocacy, working for immigrant rights and so on."

Corbo says she was pleased and inspired by the celebration. "In some ways, it was the best day of my life. Many of the women we'd honored came and spoke, their daughters came and spoke, and people were giving the thumbs-up or honking as they drove by."

After investing a full year in the planning and execution of the mural, Corbo, who holds an undergraduate degree in art therapy, says she's taking a little break from community organizing to focus on a new job as well as her own skills as a painter. She proudly admits that she personally nominated one of the women honored by the mural: Anne Berblinger, a 61-year-old woman who co-owns an organic farm and who worked for the Economic Development Administration for more than 30 years. "I feel very lucky to know her," Corbo says, "and to experience firsthand the way she has contributed to building her community." **jo**

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Robin Corbo

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