

Barlow Mural: the

Painted in the mid-'70's by Art Instructor Jack Adams as a gift

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Jack Adams stood beside me, his eyes full of life and sparkling with excitement. His hands, the hands that have sculpted people into creation and given flowers their color, flew through the air in an animated pantomime.

Hesitantly, a young man interrupted. "Are you the one who painted this mural?" he asked.

Jack nodded.

"Can you tell me what it means?"

And Jack's face lit up again as he proceeded to explain the motives and meanings behind his work of art.

Perhaps you too have wondered about the mural in Barlow Hall. Perhaps you have created your own story surrounding the pyramid of anguished people, or even invented interpretations of its symbols. If you have, then you are one of many who have been captivated by the mural's complexity.

The Image Unveiled

I, to be honest, cannot shake the image of that prowling Jackal—its muzzle soaked in blood, legs emerging out of black smoke, eyes narrowed and glowing, looking down on anyone who passes by as if they were prey.

What exactly does the Jackal represent?

"He is a Beast," Adams described. "A Beast which emerges from our industry and pollutes the world." He admits that he borrowed the idea from an African-American artist who used the image as a symbol for social protest. Adams' own protest was against industrialization and commercialism, both of which he saw as dire threats to our world.

If that was not what you got from looking at the Jackal, it really does not matter.

"Many people would share their own interpretations of my mural," commented Adams, "and sometimes they had better ideas than I

did."

Adams' own explanation, however, is truly amazing. He is, after all, its creator.

He stated that one half of the mural depicts the filth and corruption of our land. The other half depicts a perfect environment, free from the plagues of our current world.

Yet the most impressive portion of this mural, not to mention Adams' favorite part, is the wall of people.

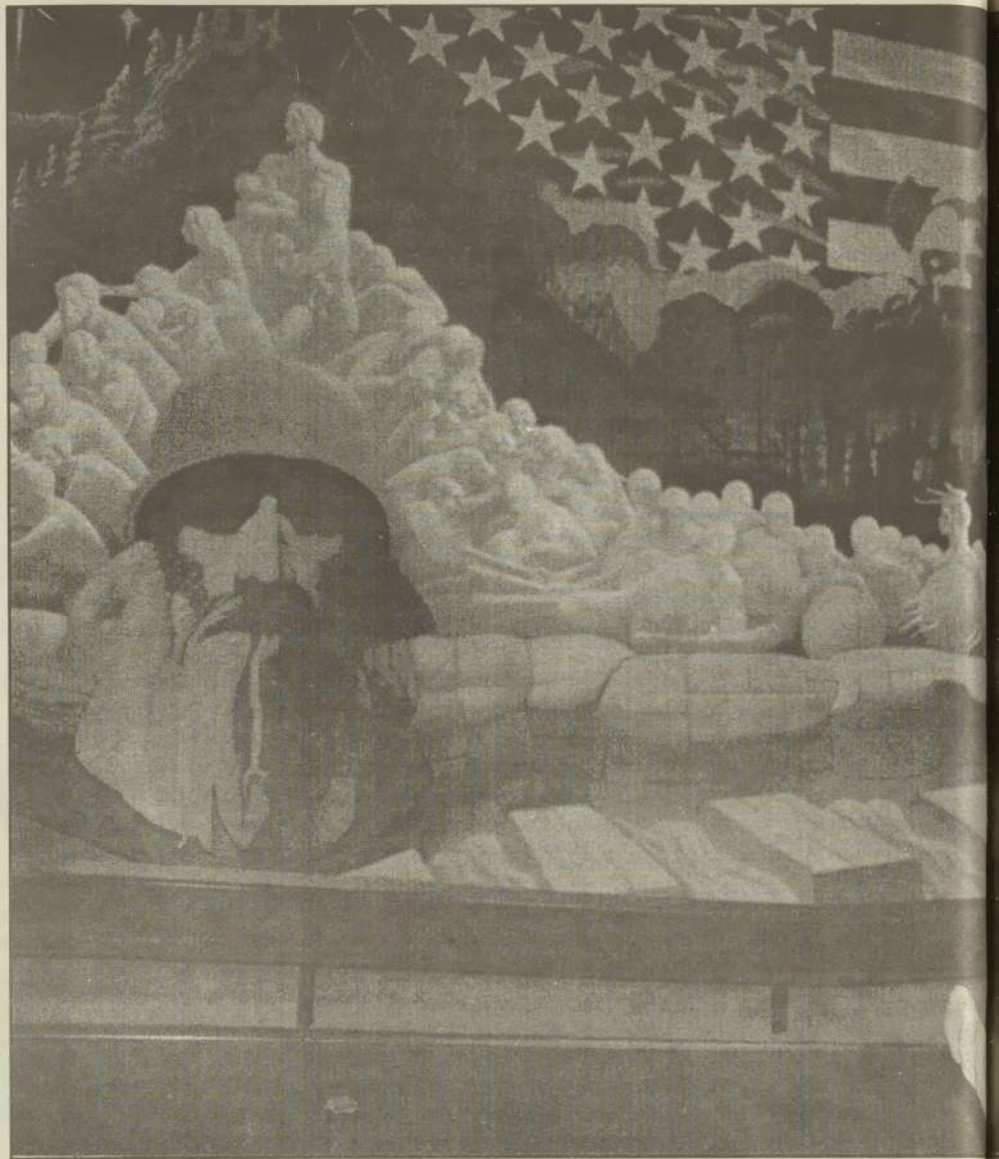
"They were an afterthought, but I can't imagine [it] without them," Adams said. "The whole wall is very progressive. We start out with the Indians, who were pushed off their land so people could exploit it, and then we move on to soldiers. Next to them, the faceless policemen."

Those last two images are a direct reflection of the era in which the mural was painted. The Vietnam war had ended only a few years before, and society was still coping with the aftermath. Also, school protests were on the rise and police were forced to arm and protect themselves against angry students.

"The mural represents the early '70s, how I felt and how society felt," Adams pondered for a moment and then added, "That is the one thing I would want students to walk away knowing about my project."

As the wall of faces continues, a startling image appears: huddled people, ghostlike, with terror on their faces, clinging to each other. They are struggling to find a way out of the destruction and the watchful eyes of that "Beast" that lurks above. Adams calls these the "repressed" people. He spent a long time creating each face to be individual and to be flooded with emotion and personality. He succeeded.

However, some of these repressed people are able to break free and emerge victorious. They are called the "family figures." These mothers and fathers send their children into a new world, free from harm and pollution. Adams had pictured that as a symbol of releasing their



Jack Adams briefly visited Clackamas last Wednesday to discuss the meaning of his mural "Centricon."

children into a new beginning.

These children have Spirit Guides to watch over and protect them. The Spirit Guides, all male and dressed in long brown robes, were an idea taken from Greek mythology. Although they bear a resemblance to monks, do not let the attire fool you, these are angels and the guardians of this new and "perfect" world.

The Origin Explained

Adams started this project in 1973. He awoke one night from a

strange dream and it was immediately impressed upon him to turn his dream into a painting. Snapshots from this dream became the foundation for the mural's main concept. "I saw an airplane traveling through the sky and, as it was flying, it turned into a butterfly," Adams recalled.

It was this image of the metamorphosis from the unnatural to the natural that inspired the mural's theme: The old environment vs. the

ment vs. the new environment.

The name for the painting, "Centricon," also appeared in Adams' dream. What does it mean? Nothing, really. Adams even had to look up the word in a dictionary to learn what it implied. He decided it meant "center," which has nothing to do with the mural itself. Nonetheless, it is the mural's official title.

When Barlow Hall opened in 1974, Adams who was working



This section of the mural represents Spirit Guides from Greek myth forming a path of protection for the children of innocence.

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