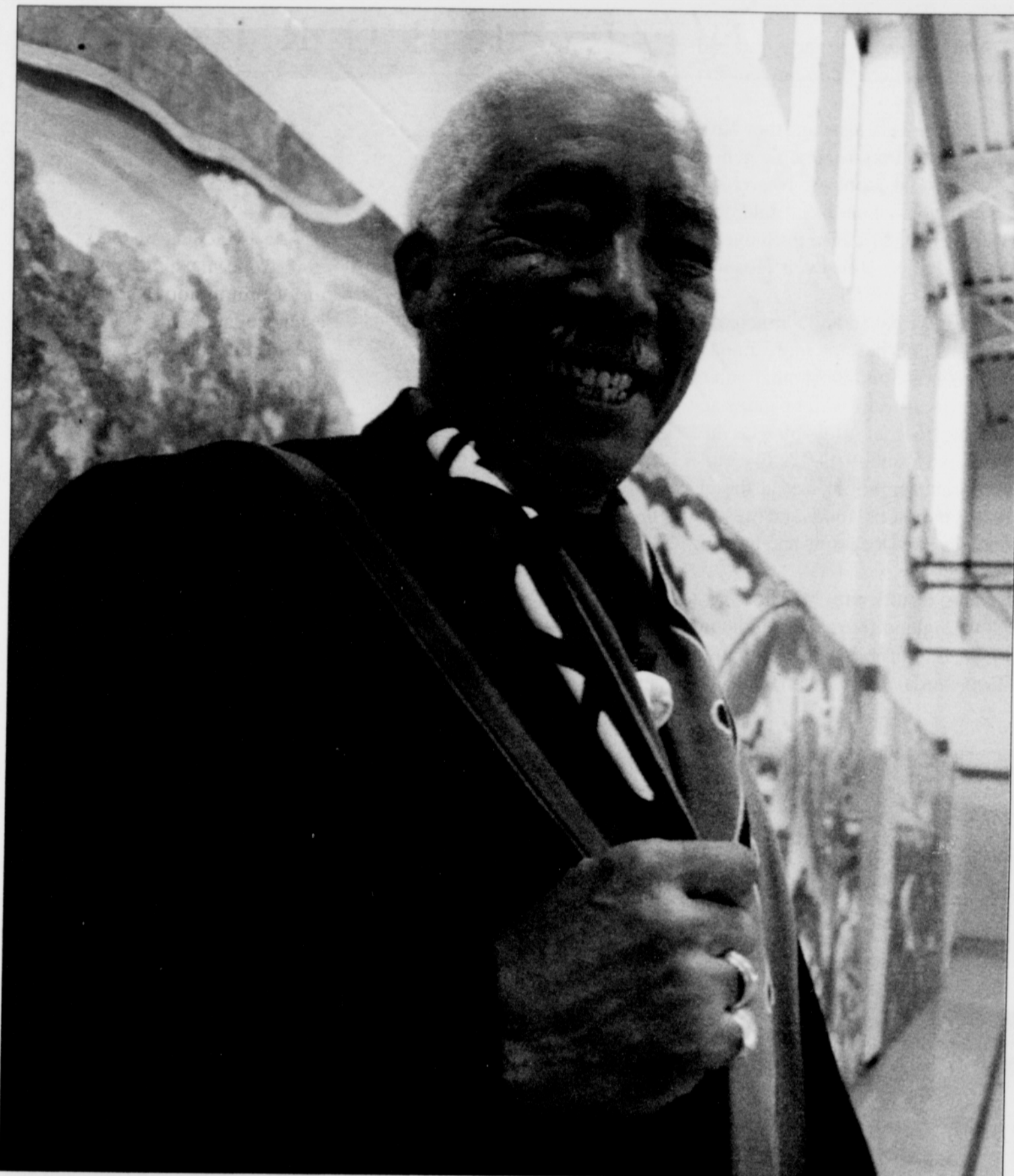


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Artist Arvie Smith stands in front of the completed mural "Hope," which he has worked on for the past two years with young men and women incarcerated with Measure 11 offenses.

Art as Transformation

Murals project opens minds to young offenders

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Community members from throughout the Portland area recently gathered in the Donald E. Long Juvenile Center to celebrate the completion of a murals project done by young men and women incarcerated in the northeast Portland facility.

Under the guidance of local artist Arvie Smith, the artist in residence for "intersections" a program that encourages art within social and community settings, the youth created five 8 foot by 15 foot murals that will become a part of Multnomah County's public art collection.

The project began almost two years ago in July 2009 as a way to engage dozens of young offenders in the detention center for Measure 11 offenses with minimum mandatory sentences. Throughout their time at the center, the youth also took drawing and painting classes taught by Smith to receive academic credit.

"Hope is at the heart of the compositions," Smith said. "I think the whole creative process is something that can transport us from an environment that perhaps you wish you weren't in, to an environment that can be your future."

The Donald E Long Juvenile Detention Home was remodeled in 1995 as a secure place to detain youth between the ages of 12 and 17-years-old, who can stay at the facility from one to 260 days of the year.

Helping Smith celebrate the project with community members and public officials on June 22 was Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen, Department of Community Justice Director Scott Taylor, and Regional Arts Council Board Chair Carol Smith.

"This makes me know our public arts program is really worth it," said Cogen after viewing the murals inside the center walls. At a time when the community is working on all fronts to provide meaningful alternatives for young people, he explained the murals are a clear example of how creativity can be transformative.



Vivid colors and dramatic details mark a series of 8 foot by 15 foot murals created by incarcerated youth who took drawing and painting classes to receive academic credit.



Community representatives tour a series of impressive murals inside the Donald E. Long Juvenile Center that were created under an artist in residence program.