

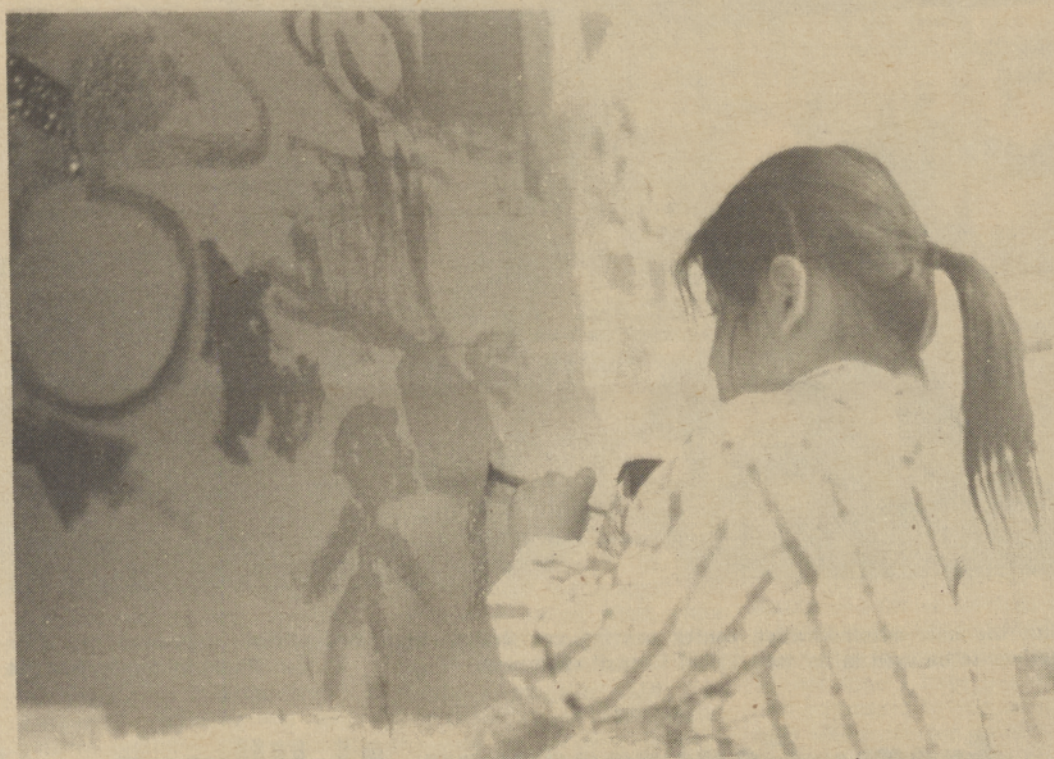
There's an artist in the school...

(Oregon's Artists in Schools program has come to Warm Springs and Simnasho in the form of an artist and a poet. Johnson-O'Malley Enrichment Funds matched with funds from the Oregon Arts Commission have made this program possible.)

The following is an account of Portland-area artist Bill Garnett's first three weeks in the grade schools. The next edition of Spilyay Tymoo will feature Indian poet Duane Niatum, who is due to arrive April 4.)



(And he's letting us draw on the walls!)



Kindergartner Rachel Frank exhibits the quiet enthusiasm with which many of the kids contributed to the mural on the W.S. grade school wall. Without hesitation they took up brushes and painted whatever pleased them. (above)

Bill Garnett does a preliminary sketch for the upper grades' mural while Roscoe Greene watches. Believing that the process of art should be made public, he worked amidst the confusion of the hallway and welcomed kids' comments. He also invites parents to come in and take a look while kids finish the mural. (left)
Photos by Stowell

Traffic patterns have changed in two of the grade school halls. Where before there was no reason to hesitate, now teachers slow down to exchange comments, the custodian's cart lingers, and kids collide as their eyes sweep the walls.

The school's just not the same.

And "that artist" started it all by sticking paintbrushes in the kids' hands and instructing them to do just what they had been taught for years not to do—draw on the walls!

Artist in residence Bill Garnett is causing a stir in the reservation's grade schools during his four week visit and he hopes the energy he has inspired will still be bouncing off the walls long after he is gone.

Garnett will leave behind him two sizable murals that are permanent features of each building. But he insists that it isn't the finished product that's so valuable as the process itself. He knows he is succeeding when a youngster sees his friend painting and asks, "When do I get a turn?"

Just about everybody is getting a turn, too. From Kindergarten through fifth grade, kids have been donning smocks and climbing onto scaffolding to try their hands at painting. "Everybody gets to make a mess," joked Garnett. Even the staff is encouraged to take up brushes.

In the primary hallway Garnett risked potential chaos by setting the youngsters loose on the wall with a minimum of instruction ("Paint whatever you like! Don't be afraid to drip—drips can look nice, too!") Out of this freedom came an ordered flow of color and design.

The challenge for Garnett, who had previously worked only at the high school level, was to give the younger kids

"as much freedom as possible within controlled limits." This he accomplished by designing a spectrum of colored panels as a foundation. Each class was given a color to work on, and with lighter and darker shades of the same color they filled the panel with their own pictures.

Houses, faces and other "children's symbols" sprouted up and spread through the rainbow colors as Garnett stood back and watched, amazed. His experiment was working!

Garnett was tickled by the contribution Counselor Leah Conner made to the mural. The artist added the flowing, wave-like bands of color below the spectrum when the counselor pointed out the students' habit of running their hands along the wall. After all, Leah commented, "a building should show the personality of the kids."

Over in the upper grades building, coyotes are leaping out of the wall and an eagle swoops, clutching a salmon. Here the fourth and fifth graders' unfinished mural is taking shape. The theme of local animals and geology is the result of Garnett's conversations with kids during his first week in the school.

Garnett felt the older kids would respond better to a more controlled effort, so he is sketching out the figures for the students to fill with color. Side by side the artist and the kids work (or is it play?) on different phases of the mural, watching it unfold and grow.

Garnett also took his paints up to Simnasho where the whole school shut down for a day and became a giant studio. The results—a mural, some individual paintings, and a lot of excited children.

The fast pace of the last few weeks has been a rather different experience for Garnett, who is accustomed to year-long residencies. As a participant in the Oregon Art Commission's Artists in Schools program, Garnett has spent full years in three Portland high schools.

Garnett was able to set up a studio in each location and work with students on a daily basis, trying to "affect the whole school as much as I could." Murals evolved as the key to communicating with the students.

The mural concept has been ideal for this short-term residency in Warm Springs. Garnett admits that the whirlwind project does not give him

much time to do his own artwork but he has no regrets. As in every other residency, he is learning.

"I'm a drawer more than a colorist," he says, but through his murals he has learned more about color than he ever did in graduate school. Garnett says that by working with students he has also been encouraged to bring a bit more organization into his "jazz-like" approach to art.

While he is learning, he hopes the students are "un-learning." Garnett dispels the popular notion that art should be pursued by individuals behind studio doors. "Art should be seen in public places while it is being created."

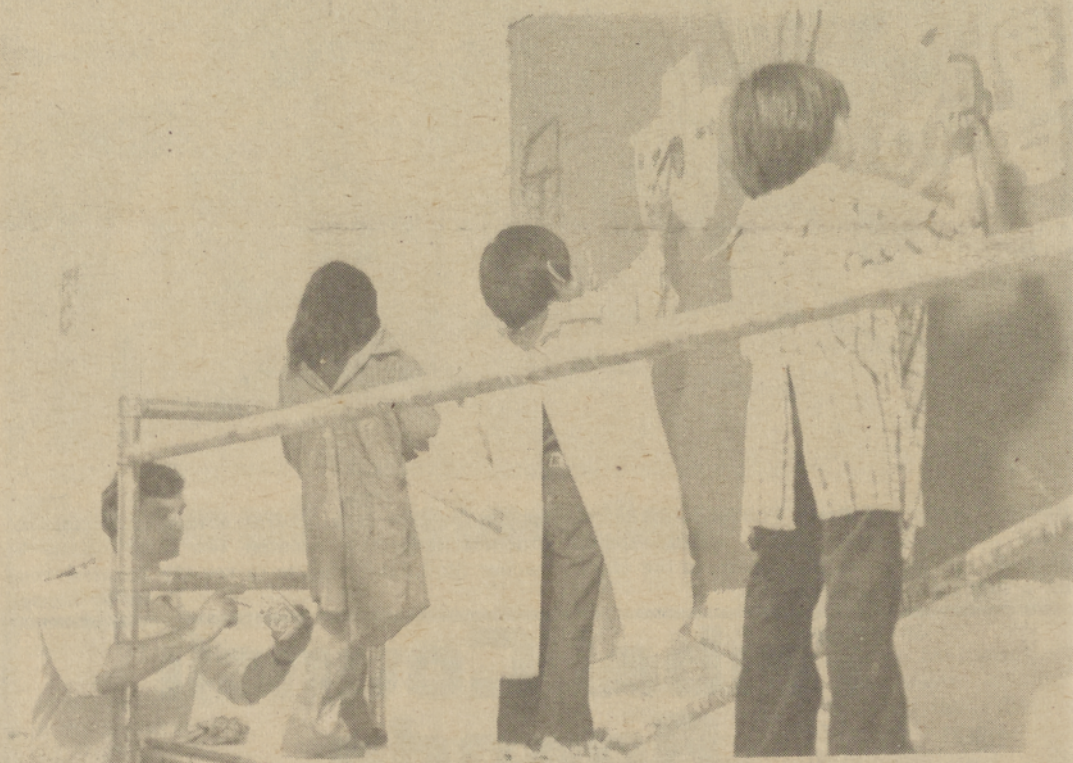
"Color and environment

are a very important part of living," says Garnett and he hopes the children have learned that "they don't have to be artists to affect their environment."

The kids have created some new surroundings for themselves that will be permanent lessons in color and design as well as a source of great pride.

The artist has created some energy and enthusiasm that seems likely to endure after he has packed up his paints and departed. Leah Conner is already talking about playground paintings, a resident sculptor, more "stimulation in the halls"...

See what happens when you let kids draw on the walls?



Standing by to mix paints and hoist kids onto the scaffold, artist Bill Garnett let the students go at the wall in their own style. Christel Leonard, Ron Williams and Reynolds Allen worked in shades of green on one of the panels of the spectrum mural.
Photo by Stowell.