

Artists let Atlantic City color their murals

AMANDA AUBLE Staff Writer

ATLANTIC CITY — Artist Denton Burrows never had a set identity in mind for the graffiti man he spray painted on the side of a Pacific Avenue liquor store.

Working in the vacant lot next to the New York Avenue 7/11, he heard guesses that included a fisherman, a wizard and even father time.

But one woman, who had been staring all day, had Burrows's favorite guess for the multi-toned old man looking out at the street with red, blue and green wires entangled in his graying beard.

"It's a little bit of everyone around here," she told him.

Burrows said that interaction validated his experience painting and meeting people in the city over the past five days, the first two which he had painted in the rain.

"That's the power of art. It's not confined to some snobby gallery. It's for everybody," he said.

He and six other artists took on the challenge of painting five murals in five days as part of the 48 Block's Mural Week. 48 Blocks, a partnership program between the Atlantic City Arts Foundation and Stockton University, started ushering murals into the city two years ago and presents other events for artists.

Artists continued to work past the original five days to finish their unique designs to beautify the city, but they also allowed the city to propel their art.

This was Burrows' first time in the city, and he said what stood out to him was the contrast between the city's big, bustling casinos and some surrounding abandoned properties.

While he's based in New York City, Burrows said he likes painting in places like Atlantic city that need public art.

"A place that's gone through so many up and downs and I guess is now in sort of a purgatory phase of where it's not clear what's going to happen, at the very least I think that public art can inspire people," Burrows said.

"I like the look on his face," said local artist Victor San Doval, looking at Burrow's work.

The 41-year-old has lived in the Atlantic City for 28 years now and he said he wished he saw more of these things when he was younger.

"For as long as I've been here, no one walks around and gets inspired by what they see anywhere. Murals are important. I think they serve as good reminders of where we are. It might take your mind somewhere else," he said.

Doval, who has his own t-shirt business at the Noyes Arts Garage, biked around and helped get the paint with 48 blocks organizer Zach Katzen. It's an artist community that Katzen said isn't growing but is finally stepping out.

"We're connecting. Everyone's connecting now," Doval said.

Katzen, who has probably 100 photos of random walls throughout the city, is the driving force behind the mural project. He works with real estate agents and knocks on doors to secure walls for the artist.

"They've always been here but they've never felt that there's been an outlet or there is support."

Artists Mark Chu, of New York and Charles Barbin, of Brigantine, are two artists who met at another 48 Blocks event, Arteriors.

They but decided to work together to create a vintage streetscape on Casino Reinvestment and Development Authority building on North New Jersey Avenue.

"It's advertising when advertising was a bit more sincere," Chu said.

For more than 50 years those kinds of signs were veteran artist and muralist Glenn Taylor's specialty. He painted all the Central pier boards 40 ft tall and 380ft long before advertisers decided to use mass-produced vinyl prints to put up on their billboards.

He's old school. Taylor painted his mural of Sammy Davis Jr. on the side of Pizza King on Atlantic Avenue where local painter Glenn Taylor opted out of the mechanical lifts and opted to use his own pully-rigged scaffolding.

Taylor, 70, chose to paint the musician who's legacy hovers around Atlantic City that he felt should not be forgotten.

Climbing up and down the rickets equipment, Taylor said that no one should worry. He wasn't lifting the full 200 pounds. When the 70-year-old has to lunge his body to pull the ropes, which is more often than someone watching him on the ground would like, it's only about 65 pounds.

Along with locals like Taylor, artists came from other places to make their mark.

Felipe Ortiz, an artist who splits his time in Colombia and Boston, chose to paint birds native to the New Jersey Coast on the Rodeway Inn across the street from the vacant Atlantic Club.

Long Island artist BK Foxx created a large "Not For Sale" sign on the side of the BullShot Bar on Pacific Avenue painted a woman tearing a check.

Jay Hernandez, who works at Ocean Casino, biked by this one after work and was excited to see how it progressed.

"I think there should be a lot more pieces like this around the city," he said. "I think there's a lot of talent in Atlantic City and they need to give them the opportunity to display their work."