

BARON COURTS OF PRESTOUNGRANGE & DOLPHINSTOUN

USA VISIT COMMENCING 20 AUGUST 2004

“OUR DIARY”

DEAR DIARY:

Friday 20th August

The Dempster and Convenor of the Mural Arts Action Group left Edinburgh for Heathrow having woken at 3.00 a.m. and met the Baron Sergeant at Heathrow Terminal 4 to catch the 11.10 a.m. flight to Philadelphia.

After a pleasant BA flight we arrived to march the airport corridors several times to find the Ground Transportation to the hotel. Tiredness was exacerbated by the very humid climate.

Our very first experience of Philadelphia murals was one on a gas tower a few miles away from the airport. The gas tower depicted “transport” and a welcome message. This mural was very modern in comparison with Andrew’s “transport” mural on the sea wall, which is historical. The second mural was under a bridge and the subject matter was hard to understand with the speed of the bus!

Within seconds of arriving at the hotel, Andrew contacted Brian Campbell, a key person involved in the Murals Arts Programme in Philadelphia. We met Brian at the Cosi Café in Locust Street. Cappuccinos all round and he gave us a brief outline of his involvement. His programme started in 1984 and in this short spell of time to date they now have over 2,300 murals. We later found this figure varied according to which tour bus we were on.

Brian had just taken digital pictures of his latest murals, which involved criminals in the State Penitentiary. Obviously some inmates cannot leave the Penitentiary so the murals are painted on “parachute cloth” in sections and then with a special bonding cum stretched onto an appropriate wall. The paints used were acrylic and supplied by Nova Paints. (A company Anne and I knew all about from the stimulating talk in Lindsay last year) It was interesting to hear that the anger and frustration of the inmates was displayed in creating the murals. Those involved with facilitating the programme used this as a means of healing.

Brian had visited Scotland and has family connections in Arbroath and took his father on a family reminiscing tour, which included Edinburgh Fringe, Berwick. Although he had travelled so close to Prestonpans it was not a place he remembered. We could only deduce that there was nothing of interest to take him there. The Prestoungrange Heritage Museum had not attracted him to venture off the A1 either.

We explained our plans for 2006 and was very enthusiastic about attending. We gave him the Mural Trail leaflet and promised to follow up with the other promotional material which was coming hot off the press as we spoke.

His leaving statement was that there was a possibility that the Eisenhower Affiliates provide grants for exchange students for 6-8 weeks. The purpose is for them to understand other countries mural programme. Following up to be done here.

Philadelphia Through a Muralists eyes:

The Philadelphia trip was very useful because we meet Brian Campbell who, as the main administrator of the murals programme, was able to fill us in on the role the murals plan within the City.

This was further backed up when we went on a Murals tour to South Philadelphia. There are 2500 murals in the City, making it bigger than Los Angeles and the largest concentration of murals in the world.

On the tour we saw around 30 murals, the murals are now part of the official sightseeing tours of the City as well. We were able to buy tickets in the information desk in the main tourist building in the City centre; this shows how murals are seen as part of the official culture of the City. They do two tours a week and are usually fully booked. Each bus/trolley takes around 30 people each paying \$15.

What was so interesting as a muralist on both trips to Philadelphia and Ely was the different ways and materials that are used to create murals. In Philadelphia most use:

1. A grid system to blow up approved image
2. A punch system: where the image is roughly drawn onto paper that is the size of the mural, then the outline is punched through the paper, leaving the rough outline on the wall. This can be done with an electronic punch machine.

One technique the Philadelphia murals have, which is very unusual, is painting the mural onto parachute material then sticking the mural onto a wall with a strong adhesive.

The range of subject matter was very diverse, but mainly fell into:

1. Decorative
2. Famous people: community leaders, stage and screen stars, local folk done well, living or dead.
3. Education themes
4. Historical events
5. Abstract/conceptual pieces
6. Children/youth projects

The other main issue that came through time and time again was maintenance and the problem using even high quality acrylic or emulsions. Did not see one example of Kiem paint. Although I know Richard Haas uses Kiem.

Saturday 21 August

A bit of a surprise this morning when the Receptionist informed us 'no breakfast is served at weekends at this Hotel' so off we went in search of a hearty start to the day.

Today's mission was to explore the 'Voices of the Community' and join the city's Mural Arts Program for a 2-hour trolley tour at 11.00am.

The Independence Visitors Centre on 6th & Market Street, which was located opposite the famous Liberty Bell Centre, here we met up with Amy introduced ourselves and quickly gave her a run down why we had visited and what we were up to in Scotland. Amy and Colleagues then handed over three complimentary tickets for the tour and off we went with our Guide Caroline to catch the trolley.

We knew there was around 2500 murals and did not expect to see them all, but we did get the opportunity see between 40/50 murals in different neighbourhoods.

We heard how the once empty and scarred walls throughout Philadelphia were now filled with visual arts, and how it all began and why Philadelphia is the mural capital of the world.



Our bus driver a rather grumpy Andrew drove us through a planned tour and sometimes even stopped at the right pit stops so we could all take the opportunity to snap away. We heard how the city sponsored the anti-graffiti initiative and the Mural Arts Program established itself and became a leader in the making and teaching of public art.

Its true that the art is more than just a pretty picture especially when Caroline our guide explained some of the problems and hassle Artists had to overcome before they started, usually cultural and how important it was to ask the communities exactly what they wanted displayed on their wall.

Each mural expresses the important issues, concerns, desires and memories voiced by the residents who live within the walls of art. We were pleasantly surprised when touring the more deprived areas how at ease the locals were at us invading their pavements especially the youngsters who ran beside the bus trying to out run us whilst waving and smiling. The murals are also providing opportunities for such communities to express important concerns, values and aspirations.



Painting the town is definitely a way of not forgetting their past, researching local History pays homage to the vanishing past and in one way reclaims it. Once the mural is completed the artist formally turns the mural over to its rightful owner – the community, and there it lives on.

The Murals Arts Program is only partially funded by the City of Philadelphia and therefore relies on the generosity of its friends and supporters who believe in the power of public art.

It's not just walls that display art we noticed whilst walking the avenues in Philadelphia that bus shelters were used to display works of art design with coloured shaped glass built into the brick structure.



Sunday 22 August

The day was spent on a hop-on hop-off open top bus, which toured the City passing many sculptures, skyscrapers and historical buildings. Having completed the full tour we decided to continue half way round again and visit the Art Museum. A vast building with 72 steps where Sylvester Sty lone (Rocky) ran up and now visitors are challenged to do the same. Needless to say we declined and blamed our weakness on jetlag so we walked up instead. At the top you could look back down the steps at a magnificent view of the avenues leading to the City. (All City roads North to South being named after trees and East to West numbered)

We passed a magnificent statue of Joan of Arc presented by the French. Apparently when the gold leaves fell off the statue it was sent back to France for a complete replacement statue, but the French stuck the leaves on and sent the same statue back.

Whether you take the mural trip or the open top bus it is always apparent that they are very proud of their murals. What was surprising was that there were no mural souvenirs in the Independent Visitors Centre. The day sped by and so a relaxing evening was spent in a local restaurant. Then back to the hotel to prepare for an early flight the next morning.

By taking the two trips it did mean we were able to see very contrasting murals and experience the poorer areas as well as the more affluent. Also we learned that the locals are asked to contribute their views as to the topic of the mural to be housed in their locality.

With great amusement by all, Sylvia was asked if she wanted a Senior Citizen ticket on the open top bus as it applied to all those over 55!!! Having not got there yet, but must have looked it, was granted \$3 off the ticket anyway.

Monday 23 August

Left Philadelphia on a 07.55 a.m. flight to Las Vegas arriving at 10.28 a.m.

A quiet day was had by all but lots of walking!!

Tuesday 24 August

After a hearty breakfast on the first floor of the hotel we found Avril and Gordon waiting for us in the Coffee Shop on the ground floor. We loaded up the "people carrier" and set off for the 5-hour journey to Ely Nevada.

There were no murals on our journey across the desert – just one straight road as far as the eye could see. Plenty of space for mural opportunities!!

Wednesday 25 August – Saturday 28th August

Start of the Global Arts & Tourism Conference. We were horrified to find that all our promotional material had not arrived and after several telephone calls found it was all sitting in Memphis customs. Not to be deterred we placed Satire and the Baron of Prestoungrange's baronial flag on our display table and left everyone with the curiosity of what we were going to present.

Luckily the 9 boxes arrived at the 11th hour before Gordon's presentation and all hands were put to work to collate the 110 carrier bags. Many thanks to Avril, Anne and Susan who helped us.

The Conference was very enjoyable and the organisers had put on a splendid programme for us. The presentations were interesting and it was a relief to find that some of the sessions incorporated walking tours around the town. The evenings entertaining was fun but rather similar.

Ely is a very small town but has a great feeling of community spirit and involvement.

The bringing together of such a diverse range of people to explore the concept of 'Mural towns' in a very remote town in the States was always going to provide interesting material and a range of discussions:-

From the mainly retired Community activists who want to improve their town, to the professional muralist/artist seeking the next big commission; from the tourist industry professional to the Public Art/Community Art organisers; from the very proud Ely Historical Society to the amateur artist who finds they have done several successful murals or sculptures; from the local politicians who want to support the murals programs to local business people who wish to help; from the very politically correct artists who support indigenous cultures to Scottish Barons who have ambition.

A month before our visit there had been a very big murals conference in Philadelphia, where a lot of the really big names in Community Art/Murals/Community Art had gathered.

The following is taken from the Muralart conference website:

'Elijah Anderson, Sociology Professor, University of Pennsylvania

Philip Goldsmith, Managing Director, Philadelphia

Rick Lowe, Project Row Houses, Houston

Jon Pounds, Chicago Public Art Group

Jim Prigoff, 20th Century Art Historian

Dr. Guadalupe Rivera Marin, daughter of artist Diego Rivera, and

Founder of the Diego Rivera Foundation

Jane Golden, director of murals programme, Philadelphia

and

JUDY BACA (Keynote Speaker) artist and co-founder of the Social and Public

Art Resource Center (SPARC), where she has served as Artistic Director for over 25 years. Baca believes in the power of community-based public art to address social justice issues for ethnic neighborhoods and the working poor. She is perhaps best known for The Great Wall of Los Angeles, a landmark pictorial representation of the history of ethnic peoples of California.'

Both conferences portray a different vision and different history of murals.

Really should such important conferences be so different and have different agendas, is a debate that needs to be addressed. There was contact between the conferences before both events but nothing really materialised. This is a real pity because each could benefit from more exchange of information and knowledge.

Andrew has made contact with Jon Pounds and he is an expert within this field.

The importance of The Ely conference was the diversity of the delegates, with not such an emphasis on professionals gives it a confidence that not many art conferences have.

The power of the Ely conference was its grassroots nature and how murals have a real purpose in the community.

There were many great and enthusiastic presentations of how murals have been a catalyst for change and regeneration. These were very powerful evidence of why murals work within this context.

The ideas noted were:

1. Some great funding ideas: Parking meters to generate funds, rounding up food bills.
The role youth can play in mural painting
2. Throughout the conference the creation of murals was shown to be a catalyst for change in education, events, transport, architecture, children activities, community business, youth apprenticeships, tourism, theatre, music.
3. Art maps, routes and tours
4. Flag murals

The highlight of the conference for Andrew was the Artist's debate. All these successful muralists such as John Pugh, Art Mortimer, Wei Luan was very interesting. To see them debate on material and maintenance was very useful. And what difficult subjects these are and the range of solutions available.

Some of them Andrew noted:

1. Protection of murals, use of plastic shields: Rowan paints 800 247 6626, water based clear gel.
2. Miller dry lock
3. Nova coater
4. Projecting images onto walls: fixed lenses projectors (second-hand on e-bay)

The most enjoyable and creative session Andrew personally had was on the Thursday evening, with Michele, Karen and an administrator from California when talking about "If we were to plan out how to develop the mural towns concept". The three women were experienced administrators.

This is what we discussed:

1. To get so many to Ely was a tremendous achievement, gathering all that knowledge in one place. Was that fully exploited?
2. Need a plan of action to get major funding from Canada, USA, UK, and Tasmania to develop the true potential. To make this concept work needs a lot of work
3. The conference really had two functions. As a tourist/study tour of the area and planning workshop for future development.
4. Just saying how wonderful the concept is, it not enough.
5. How are we going to gather the evidence and what are we going to do with it? Where will that take us and how are we going to get there?
6. What can individual people bring to this party?

The next morning Gordon Prestoungrange began to grapple with the issues.

Sunday 29th August

This was the day to say our goodbyes and for Dempster, Convenor and Baron Sergeand to start the drive back across the desert to Las Vegas with the Baron Sergeand at the helm. Approximately 5 hours later they arrived in Las Vegas, very hot and tired from the journey. Having navigated our way around Las Vegas to find the airport to take the hire car back, we eventually arrived at our hotel on The Strip.

The final part of the study tour was Las Vegas. This is where a lot of murals, sculpture, and music are used to attract many millions of people. Here is a very successful example of tourism. The fantasy of Vegas is truly astounding. The many millions that have been spent to create the fantasy are breathtaking. The murals are technically breathtaking too. The reproduction of so many world heritage sites is remarkable and all completed in concrete!

With all the fine ideals of murals and regenerating areas like Ely, it brings you back down to earth to see successful commercialism on a huge scale and how it is attractive to so many. It relates to Ely because the town is itself under threat because Las Vegas need more water and are seeking to try and re route Ely's water supply.

Wednesday 1st September

We left Las Vegas and headed home to Scotland and England and a slightly cooler atmosphere.

Home safe and sound here ends the Diary!

With thanks to the Baron of Prestoungrange for letting us have this wonderful experience.

REFLECTIONS OF WHAT PARTICULAR LESSONS CAN BE APPLIED IN PRESTONPANS

A: The Global 2006 conference can be viewed from an interesting perspective. It is really two events:

1. A Study Tour/ Trip to Scotland; and
2. Workshops to get down to nitty gritty of how to link all these towns and get money to do exchange of artists, activists, funders, locals, etc.. In others words professionalism in attitude and skill.

In Ely the Vernon team know this well and have found how to make good funding links.

The Global Conference can invite talent of the calibre of Brian Campbell, Jane Golden, Judy Baca and Jon Pounds. From the UK we should invite National Gallery of Scotland, David Harding and other experts. Bromley by Bow should be invited, Craigmillar Communiversity and Scotland Unlimited.

B: Murals Tours

What we learnt from the Philly tours was don't try to do too many at a time. e.g. 10 murals is plenty and be sure to enough time to talk about them properly. Its only then that the get a message across.

ANNE TAYLOR - The Dempster
ANDREW CRUMMY - The Convenor
SYLVIA BURGESS - The Baron Sergeand