

FROM SKID ROW TO ART ROW



PETER BATTISTON/VANCOUVER SUN

NEW LOOK: Artist Leona Parks shows off a mural she helped paint around the Portland Hotel.

Art brightens city core

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In a first-time collaboration between community groups and Vancouver's engineering department, Downtown Eastside residents and street peo-

ple are wielding paint brushes in a bid to clean up the grimy Hastings street strip.

More than 20 giant-sized murals are being created for some of the most prominent — and unlikely — locations in

the city.

The outside front wall of the police station on Main Street will be hung with a two-storey high mural picturing a pregnant Barney-like di-

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Murals to be unveiled at celebration

nosaur, along with garlands of flowers and a mother and child, all painted by members of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre.

Nearby, raunchy landmarks like the Balmoral Hotel, the old Smilin' Buddha nightclub site and Pigeon Park are to get a similar beauty treatment.

It's all part of the Walls of Change, and city council has allocated \$55,000 to the Carnegie Community Centre Association, sponsor of the project.

One of the first Walls to go public is on the construction boardings of the new Portland Hotel now being built on Hastings.

Like most of the other murals in the project, the Portland Wall is full of traditional native Indian motifs. But it has a few personal touches, too.

Leona Parks, a veteran of the street scene who has lived in the old Portland for years, wanted to memorialize a friend who died prematurely. "Everyone at the Portland got together, put our ideas together," said Parks, 31.

"We wanted it to be something good, positive. I did the picture of my friend Bruce who passed away. I'm so proud of it."

For John McLewin, the city's superintendent of sanitation, the experience has been a mind-blower. "We're going to be fine," he said. "I'm finding it tremendously exciting."

City engineering crews are power-washing the walls on which murals are to be painted directly, and are helping mount those that were painted on canvas in a makeshift studio.

Under a clean-up plan approved by city council, crews have also started power-washing the sidewalks along Hastings Street. Brighter street lights will also be installed to try to cut down on street crime at night.

The murals will be formally unveiled at a day-long community celebration May 30, starting at 11 a.m. in Oppenheimer Park, 400-block Powell, and continuing at 3 p.m. at Pigeon Park, Hastings and Carrall.

About 200 residents are designing and painting the murals, under supervision of 15 professional artists from the community, led by long-time muralist Richard Tetraalt.

The canvas murals will be taken down before the fall rainy season, and then will go display indoors at a location to be determined.

Walls of Change coordinator Sharon Kravitz said all the participants have insisted the images on the murals be positive.

"This is a neighbourhood that is usually characterized as a hole in the wall filled with problems, but when the people who live here get a chance to express themselves, they are creative and hopeful," she said. "This neighbourhood is the heart of the city. I can't imagine this kind of thing

