

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CREATING A MURAL

WHY CREATE A MURAL?

The benefits of murals are plentiful: not only do they beautify and enhance the urban environment, they deter costly tagging, foster community partnerships and pride, and can even boost the local economy. Above all, they're fun!

This guide assists artists, community organizations, business and property owners and arts and heritage organizations by recommending best practices in mural production. The guide is to be used in conjunction with the City of Nelson Murals Policy, which outlines the approval process for murals. An application form must be completed to propose a mural. The City of Nelson's Cultural Development Commission is also available to offer advice.

DEFINITIONS

COMMEMORATION: The act of honouring or perpetuating the memory of a person, persons, event, historical period or idea that has been deemed significant.

COMMUNITY ART: Public participation and collaboration with professional artists in visual art, dance, music, theatre, literary and/or media arts within a community context and venue.

MURAL: A large-scale artwork completed on a surface with the permission of the owner. Media may include paint, ceramic, wood, tile and photography, etc.

SIGN: If the primary intent of the work is to convey commercial information, it is a sign.

TAGGING: A common type of graffiti is "tagging", which is the writing, painting or "bombing" of an identifiable symbolic character or "tag" that may or may not contain letters.

PUBLIC WALLS: A space that belongs to a public organization, i.e. municipal, provincial or federal government. Approval for the mural should be among the first steps undertaken in the planning process.

PRIVATE WALLS: A space that is owned and maintained by a private individual or enterprise. Approval for the mural should be among the first steps undertaken in the planning process.

ROLES

PROPERTY OWNER: The property owner (be it private or municipal) provides the surface for the mural. It is the property owner's responsibility to be familiar with regulations and procedures prior to commissioning a mural.

ARTIST: The artist is the communicator, demonstrating style and disseminating information. The mural artist creatively inserts culture into Nelson's urban environment. The artist can work alone or lead a community group in the development of a mural.

STEPS TO CREATING A MURAL

PLANNING PHASE

- 1) Choose a site (see considerations on selecting a wall below). Consider your space requirements and be aware that routine maintenance activities such as sidewalk sweeping or snow removal may affect the mural and the wall it is on. Check with the City regarding encroachment agreements and any associated fees.
- 2) Determine the objectives and scope of the project. What is your goal? What is your vision? If you are the artist, it is helpful to create a mock-up or maquette of your chosen design before going to Step 3.
- 3) Get written permission from the property owner, be it a private owner or the municipal government. If it's a private owner, detail the terms with the owner (i.e size, content restrictions, method of attachment, budget, and responsibility for cleaning and future maintenance). If the proposed site is public property, you should review the Mural Policy and will need to complete the mural application form

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

- 1) Confirm scope, budget and materials for project
- 2) Ensure funding is in place & determine a pay schedule
- 3) Create a timeline
- 4) Assess conservation needs
- 5) Ensure compliance to City By-laws and regulations
- 6) Write and sign a contract with the property owner and/or artist
- 7) Obtain liability insurance
- 8) Purchase materials and arrange for equipment hire
- 9) Decide which method will be used to install the image to the wall
- 10) Engage the community (arrange for publicity and a launch or unveiling (an opening reception is common)

INSTALLATION PHASE

- 1) Document site before, during & after installation (photos)
- 2) Prepare and clean the surface
- 3) Create the mural being sure to use safety precautions
- 4) Offer updates to the property owner and/or municipality
- 5) Schedule an inspection of the final painted/installed mural
- 6) Clean up

EVALUATION/COMPLETION PHASE

- Final photographs should be taken and documented into an archive maintained by the Cultural Development Commission.

- Maintenance requirements (e.g. paint colours) should be recorded
- The artist's contact info should be recorded and kept up-to-date
- Public launch of mural (press & community event)
- Inspect seasonally for maintenance needs

CHOOSING A SITE/SURFACE SELECTION

The criteria you have set for the project, as well as the cooperation of the local community, business and municipality will all be factors in choosing a site.

The lifespan of a mural can be quite severely affected by the location. One of the major causes of damage to a mural is water. Ensure that there is no water seepage from roof or ground level. Additionally, damage can also be caused by snow piling up against the wall, or by routine maintenance, so try to choose a wall where this will not be a continuing problem.

The condition of the chosen wall should be checked thoroughly before work is begun. This may require an assessment from a professional conservator if it is a historical building.

Before and after photographs should be taken. Prior to any work being undertaken, the area should be measured and any wall damages or potential obstructions (branches, troughs, etc.) recorded.

A decision to be made is whether to paint directly onto the wall or onto a panel that will then be placed at the site. One of the pros of working directly onsite is community engagement with the project as they directly see the progress being made. However, it can be easier to have the mural painted onto panels offsite which when completed are mounted on the wall. The pros with this method are: ease of relocation and repair, ease for the artist who can work indoors and in any condition (day or night, rain or shine), and safety considerations (the artist will not need to be on a scaffold or near the public to work).

Best Types of Walls

BRICK, PLASTER, CONCRETE, SIGN BOARD

Best Types of Surface Panels

CREZON is a sealed plywood that can be supported with a metal structure. With laminates, it is very important that the edges be sealed.

DIBOND is a rubber core sandwiched by aluminum. This material comes in panels, and must be primed and top-coated.

Worst Types Of Surfaces

UNSEALED WOOD, ALUMINIUM

The following informational chart is provided courtesy of Golden paints and is designed for general information purposes only:

Mural Surface	Step 1: Cleaning	Step 2: Priming	Step 3: Painting	Step 4: Isolation & Varnish Coatings
Bare Wood	None	Knots and pitch streaks should be sanded and spot-primed. Apply primer coat (suitable for latex).	Apply Golden Acrylic Paints to surface.	Apply isolation coat. Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours). Apply Golden MSA Varnish* or suitable alternative.
Previously Painted Wood	Remove any loose material, power-wash clean. Abrade non-water-based coatings.	Inspect knots for staining, sand and spot-prime as needed. Apply primer coat (suitable for latex).	Apply Golden Acrylic Paints to surface.	Apply isolation coat. Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours). Apply Golden MSA Varnish* or suitable alternative.
Bare Masonry	None	Apply Masonry Conditioner. Apply Water-based latex primer.	Apply Golden Acrylic Paints to surface.	Apply isolation coat. Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours). Apply Golden MSA Varnish* or suitable alternative.
Previously Painted Masonry	Remove any loose material, power-wash clean. Abrade surface.	Apply Masonry Conditioner. Apply Water-based latex primer.	Apply Golden Acrylic Paints to surface.	Apply isolation coat. Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours). Apply Golden MSA Varnish* or suitable alternative.
Bare Metal	Remove any grease, dirt, solvents. Abrade surface.	Apply alkyd or latex-based primer.	Apply Golden Acrylic Paints to surface.	Apply isolation coat. Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours). Apply Golden MSA Varnish* or suitable alternative.
Previously Painted Metal	Remove any loose material, rust, grease, dirt. Abrade surface.	Apply alkyd or latex-based primer.	Apply Golden Acrylic Paints to surface.	Apply isolation coat. Let dry thoroughly (at least 48 hours). Apply Golden MSA Varnish* or suitable alternative.

* For complete Varnish procedures, refer to the GOLDEN Varnish Information Sheets.

PREPARING THE SITE

Wall Preparation

Ensure that humidity levels and temperature are appropriate for installation of the materials. Clean the wall, as well as scrape and chip to establish a smooth surface before applying paint. Small cracks will not cause a problem and usually get filled with paints. However, long cracks leading to the ground surface can cause a water seepage problem. If you choose to parge the wall for a smoother surface, employ a professional.

If the surface is already painted, consider what kind of paint it is and its physical condition (the artist should realize that any surface that still has the previous coating on it will not be as permanent as one that has been completely stripped and freshly coated). If the paint is water-based polymer most acrylic paints will adhere well to this. If it is a high-gloss oil paint then it must be removed for good adhesion. If existing paint is deteriorating it should be removed; however, even if it is intact it is recommended to thoroughly power wash to remove loose dirt and materials prior to painting. **Up to 80% of all coatings failure can be directly related to insufficient surface preparation.**

Mould and mildew should be removed by scrubbing with a mixture of 1 part household bleach to 3 parts water. Be sure to wear protective goggles and equipment for this task. After scrubbing with a brush, allow the solution to sit on the surface for ten minutes before thoroughly rinsing off with water. *Caution: never add ammonia to bleach.*

Cleaning Tips

- Use a solvent cleaner (powder) that removes oil.
- Patch repairs with filler. Gel medium works well. If cracks are large enough to warrant filling in, inject a construction adhesive followed by hard foam stripping pressed into the adhesive. Do not apply a silicone sealer as these products are usually too slick to get proper adhesion of the paint.
- Sandblasting is one option for smoothing out the surface area, but it will also allow water to seep into the surface, therefore it is not advised.

Safety Precautions

Make sure that the worksite is safe for the public and that artists are familiar with required materials, protection techniques and safety equipment.

Weather Considerations

Avoid painting in rain, snow and fog as the moisture will affect the drying times and will reintroduce water back into recently dried paint films. Allow proper drying/curing time between washing the surface and applying the isolation coat and varnish layer (if you are using one) as trapped moisture can hinder adhesion and cause clouding.

Ideally, the temperature during application should be between 18 degrees Celsius and 24 degrees Celsius. Higher temperatures will affect the evenness of the paint films, and lower temperatures will harm the film formation of all the coating. The absolute minimum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius.

MATERIALS

Primer: To determine the best primer for a specific surface, we suggest artists contact a local supplier of architectural coatings. Such companies have extensive experience with priming the broad spectrum of building supplies, and typically have specific primers for the surface the mural is to be painted on. Their recommendations will also take the environmental concerns of the area into account. We have found that architectural and maintenance paints are competitively priced, meaning that a product that costs more than a similar product will typically perform better as well.

When painting on brick, concrete, or other masonry surfaces, it is recommended to also use a Masonry Conditioner that can be purchased from a commercial coatings supplier.

Paint: Acrylics are some of the most durable and accessible paints for exterior application, used by many artists for painting murals due to their lightfastness and weather resistance. They also form an excellent bond to masonry or cementous surfaces. Oil paints are a poor choice for painting on these surfaces since the alkalinity of concrete can destroy alkyd or oil products. Ethyl-Silicate paints form an excellent and permanent bond with brick or concrete; however, this system can be time-consuming

and costly, and good working knowledge of the system is required as well. Solvent-based enamels are a good choice for durability, but manufacturer's pigment considerations are usually not the same as with a high-quality artist's acrylic paint.

Protective Coatings: Never apply anything to the surface of your mural that cannot be taken off without damaging the mural. A good protective coating will preserve and protect the paint beneath it. All too often, coating media is applied that obscures, discolours, or deteriorates the paint.

Additional Materials: scrapers, drop sheets, brushes/rollers, buckets, sponges, facemasks, gloves, ladder/scaffolding

What NOT to use

Artists should avoid the following commonly employed media as they may shorten the lifespan of the project:

- Acrylic varnish- UV is reflected within the surface of the varnish, which gradually clouds the varnish, causing the mural to appear faded.
- Urethane, spar varnish, and damar varnish can only be removed using alcohol, Toluene, Xylene, or Acetone. These are destructive to acrylic paint and tend to discolour over time.
- "Anti-graffiti" coatings may yellow the mural in time.

IDENTIFICATION

When the mural has been finished the artist(s) should sign their work. This could range from a simple painted signature to an interpretive label or plaque. Signage should include:

- Artist(s) name(s)
- Title of the work
- Date of the work

CONSERVATION & MAINTENANCE

Ideally the person who is commissioning the piece should be responsible for its maintenance. The contract should clearly outline who is in charge of maintaining the work and who will provide funding for maintenance. One possibility is to put maintenance expenses into the initial budget. If the commissioner of the mural is to be left in charge it is the artist's responsibility to update their contact information for future assistance. If the artist cannot be reached, the commissioner should be permitted to take action into his or her own hands.

ARTISTIC PROCESS

Community Arts Process for mural art

Community art involves collaboration between a professional artist and a community, be it a neighbourhood, marginalized group, cultural group, youth, or artists. This process involves the community in the artistic process whether through artist selection, project conceptualization, or actually having a hand in its creation.

Community Arts Project

An artist leads/facilitates a community in the conceptualization and creation of a mural. These types of projects are very good in breaking boundaries, team-building, increasing creative capacity, and building ownership of a community space.

- Ensure that the artist chosen for these types of projects has experience with the community you have identified, is patient, flexible, can communicate clearly with others, can facilitate the creative process of a group (small or large), has team-building and motivational skills and can negotiate within the team dynamics. An arts education background is an asset.
- Educational components around painting techniques, historical aspects of the community etc. are also a key component of this type of project.
- A project of this nature may take several weeks to months of planning before the actual mural production begins.

Commissioned Project

Commissioning an artist for the project promotes artistic excellence and usually involves a competition

- A professional artist is paid to conceptualize and create the work of art.
- Once designs have been approved the creation of the work can commence.
- The community gets involved in the selection of the artist and should be consulted in the concepts and themes represented in the mural.

Direct Commission

A property owner may approach an artist or invite artists on his or her own or vice versa. At a minimum the following should be considered:

- Prepare and have signed a contract that clarifies roles and responsibilities
- Require an artist resume and examples of recent work.

SELECTING AN ARTIST

Call to Artists

A Call to Artists reaches a varied and broader artist base and provides opportunities to all.

- A letter / ad should be posted wherever it is attainable to artists; consider your community newspapers to target a smaller community, or an electronic bulletin board that artists reference
- Allow at least a month from the time you post the ad to the submission date

BUDGET

The budget is conditional on many things, including quality, size and location.

Keep these key points in mind when putting a price on something:

- Artist fees*
- Mural materials
- Wall preparation
- Installation (equipment & fees)
- Applicable permit fees

- Liability insurance - consider timeframe of coverage from initial creation of mural to end of installation
- Provision for ongoing maintenance costs
- Publicity (may include a planned launch with an opening reception)

* *artist fees may include materials, installation, etc., or you may include these as separate line items*

Payment Schedule

The payment schedule should be clearly outlined in the contract. Most of the expenses will be incurred prior to the start of work. The artist should be given at least enough money to cover these costs.

- 40% upon signing the contract
- 30% during the Installation phase
- 20% upon completion of the mural
- 10% after inspection

CONTRACTS AND LEGAL ISSUES

Contracts for a mural should include the following:

- Outline roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. For example, who is responsible for installation, conservation, clean up, storage, and maintenance
- A description of the artwork, location and anticipated lifespan
- A timeline outlining how long the project will take
- Payment Schedule
- Liability insurance
- Ownership / copyright
- Maintenance requirements and responsibility
- The artist moral and copyrights

Insurance

Multiple parties are involved when producing a mural. To protect these individuals, insurance should be obtained:

- If you are an artist you should obtain **personal accident injury insurance**.
- If you are the organization or private business managing the project you should have **third party liability insurance**.
- If the work is commissioned by a community association.

(If volunteer labour is used – a volunteer waiver form should be signed by all participants)