

# How to Paint a Mural

## **What is a mural?**

A mural is a large scale painting. A mural can be painted directly on a wall or on panels or canvas that can be attached to a wall.

## **What is the first step in painting a mural?**

The first step in painting a mural is to develop a design. (See "Additional Considerations" for schools and community groups.)

## **What styles are appropriate for murals?**

Murals can be painted in any style - hard-edge, impressionistic, realistic, abstract, or a mix of styles.

## **How is a small design made into a large scale mural?**

There are various methods for turning a small design into a mural.

- A design can be drawn on paper with a grid. Each square is enlarged to a corresponding square on the mural. For example, a 12"x12" design divided into 1" squares can be made into a 12'x12' mural in which each 1" square is transferred to the corresponding 1' area of the mural.
- The design can be projected onto the wall or panel with a slide projector or opaque projector and then traced.
- The design can be sketched onto the wall or panel "freehand." This method allows you to make corrections and adjustments to your design as you sketch.

## **What are the additional steps to painting a mural?**

- Make sure your wall or panel is clean, dry and as even as possible. If painting on a wall, make sure the surface is not cracked or peeling. Repair the wall if necessary. If the wall is peeling, the mural will peel eventually, too.

- Prime the wall or panel with a high quality primer. This is an essential step, ensuring that the paint will stick to the wall or panel and that the mural will last.
- Paint the mural using a good range of colors. Indoor/outdoor house paint is fine for murals, but get the most vivid colors possible. If possible, use colors mixed at the factory, not in the paint store. Get a good range of primary and secondary colors, and white and black, and then use these basic colors to mix your own.
- Use a water-based paint if there will be any changes in temperature or humidity. Water-based paints allow more expansion and contraction than oil-based paints.
- If you can afford high quality acrylic paints, I recommend Golden Paints or those used by the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program.
- I do not put a sealant on my murals, although many artists do. I do not want to risk discoloration, cracking, chipping or peeling of the sealant. I prefer to rely on the quality of my wall preparation, my primer and my paint and allow for a direct experience of the mural.

### **What is the history of mural making?**

Murals have been painted throughout history:

- Mosaic murals in ancient Greece, Italy and Sicily depicted everyday life.
- Fresco murals in Italy were often religious in nature.
- Mexican murals by Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros celebrated and taught history, including the Mexican revolution and ancient Aztec and Mayan cultures.
- The US experienced a surge of murals in the 60's and 70's.
- A recent resurgence of mural painting has especially occurred in Philadelphia, where thousands of murals exist.