



The Dept. of Public Art received a \$5000 grant from the Chenango Co. Arts Council and the Hoyt Foundation in 2015 to place murals on blighted properties. In all, DPA volunteers placed 37 panels on 11 sites.

The *Blight as Our Canvas* project aimed to post temporary murals on blighted properties in Binghamton. The goal of the project was to get public art into neighborhoods and to improve the appearance of blighted properties. Audiences included neighborhood residents, local artists interested in painting, and property owners trying to improve their buildings.



The first event was Mural Fest 2015 (April 25) where we engaged 43 artists and painted 30 murals on 4' X 8' plywood. Most of these were subsequently available for posting on blighted properties.

The event was co-sponsored by the Dept. of Public Art and re-bold Binghamton, a BU group promoting public art, and Quarter Yellow Studio. The event included several bands, vendors, children's

activities, and support from local businesses. Mural Fest dovetailed nicely with the Blight project and the primary artistic focus was painting panels for the project. We were fortunate to have guest artists from NYC, including Damien Mitchell, Nic 707, Ivory, Indigo Arts Collective from Brooklyn, as well as local artists, Jesse Ryan, Dexter Holmes, Judy Salton, M-R Griffin, Diane Lia, Megan Smey, Lindsay Baker, and others.

Thirteen panels were created around a food theme, to be placed on a building at 511 Chenango St. on the Northside, which has been designated a "food desert." This installation involved a crew of 8-9 volunteers who gave up their Memorial Day to cover the entire face of a boarded up building.





On the First Friday (and Saturday) of July, 8 of the Mural Fest panels were on display at the State Street Block Party and 4 of them stayed up on three buildings throughout the summer (crew of 5). At the same time, the front of 211 State St. was covered with 3 mural panels depicting rhinoceros among waterfalls by Judy Salton. At the end of July as part of the Fifth Weekend series at the Cooperative Gallery, six of the mural panels were on display in conjunction with a Light Painting

event. (crew of 3).



Two of the mural panels from Mural Fest were placed on a building on 58 Glenwood Ave. in August (crew of 4); the building was sold in November and the new owners have opted to keep them until they renovate the property for a

new use.

Also in July Bruce Greig installed a mural on a prominent wall at 128 Washington St. in downtown Binghamton on a formerly three story blank wall. The mural panels depict open windows with birds flying out. This mural was also notable because it was painted on very durable sign board made of aluminum and plastic and then bolted to the wall.



In September, we hosted Susan Champeny a professional mural artist who envisioned a whole house mural, titled "Cat Fishing", designed to look like an aquarium, complete with an interested cat. The property at 21 Jarvis St. was perfect for her purposes, and with the help of 16 volunteers, we created 11 panels to cover 2 ½ sides of the building. The installation was in 7 parts, including prep to the site (cutting down a tree, etc), repair of the building, and involved 28 people

installing, for a total of 38 hours. Susan logged 80 hours and volunteers contributed 40 hours in painting with her. Susan also conducted a workshop on how to paint on fabric;

the participants painted it and it was subsequently installed on the third side of 21 Jarvis St.

In November, The Broome County Land Bank allowed us to place murals on buildings that they own, at least until the houses will be torn down. Again, using many of the murals painted at Mural Fest, an installation crew of nine people placed nine panels at 113 Liberty St., 128 Liberty St., 15 Munsell St., and 59 Lester Ave.



Thanks to the mild weather in November and December, an original mural with a geometric design by Leslie-Morgan Frederick was created for 221 State St. on the entire face of the boarded up building in late November.



Finally, two panels were put on the rear of 213 State St. December 4<sup>th</sup>; these panels were cut to fit two

boarded up windows by a crew of 3 and had been previously painted by Judy Salton.

In all, we placed murals on 11 properties, creating four site specific original murals, and using panels from Mural Fest participants and other artists, we installed 37 individual mural panels. Three events highlighted the project for the public—Mural Fest 2015 itself, State St. Block Party, and the Cooperative Gallery event, in all a couple of thousand people.



Obviously, art on blighted properties was the major service we performed but much of our work was behind the scenes researching appropriate buildings, contacting property owners, and generally promoting the concept of our project. We contacted 36 owners with letters, some of them multiple times. This process was frustrating because many of the property owners of these properties live out of town and are not invested in these neighborhoods. In particular, there were a couple of buildings that we really wanted to include but we could not get a response from the owners.



We had not anticipated in our grant proposal that Mural Fest would be so critical to our success. However, the opportunity to co-sponsor the event and be their fiscal sponsor enabled us to involve many artists from the community, local colleges, and well known muralists from other cities. The Mural Fest

was also good outreach for public art and for the Blight project, garnering media attention, and promoting local artists in the Mural Fest program. It turned out to be an excellent collaboration that has created enduring relationships for the future.

It is impossible to judge how many people have viewed or were affected by the presence of murals in their neighborhood. However, an estimate at the Jarvis St. site noted the following: Traffic/Views recorded at the site - averages based on noon-3pm: 1-3 cars per minute, roughly 150 cars per hour; 30-40 persons on foot or wheelchair per hour. The Blight project involved a total of 90 people, including 48 artists, and an installation crew of 15.

The Dept of Public Art has definitely raised appreciation of public art in this region. This project in particular brought public art to low income, marginalized neighborhoods that are seriously affected by blight and urban decay. During our installations, dozens of people stopped by with enthusiastic comments and often monetary donations. One woman from the Northside neighborhood said, "I want to thank you guys for caring about right where I live and what I look at, and what these kids from Roosevelt school look at." (captured on video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msfILSLs2o>)



The Jarvis St. location is especially busy with pedestrian traffic and young children, and the "Cat Fishing" mural with its bright colors and interesting story was well received. At the Jarvis St. location we heard these comments: "I am so glad you did this, thank you for making our neighborhood look NICE." "Mommy, there's a jelly fish - I LOVE jellyfish." "Can you add some MORE fish?" "I drive by everyday, and this makes me SMILE. I hope it will make other people drive a bit slower here, they go too fast."

Residents of the Liberty St. area, plagued by extreme poverty and blight, expressed frustration that boarded up houses continued to stand, but were appreciative of even temporary art to look at. One homeowner came out and gave us a "thumbs up".

The scope and structure of this project necessitated a large body of artists and engaged volunteers and we were fortunate to attract both. Our database has 56 interested artists and we have a team of installers of up to 15 people. In particular, Susan Champeny created skill building opportunities for many artists who worked by her side. She also ran a



well attended workshop demonstrating mural painting on cloth.

Because of the temporary nature of the murals, we are expect to take panels down and offer them to other properties as buildings are torn down or re-developed. We will continue to offer murals, as well as install and maintain them. In addition to the murals we have in stock an additional 10 were donated to us from the Mural Arts class at BCC taught by Bruce Greig and Kady Perry. Interested property owners should contact [binghamtonbridge@gmail.com](mailto:binghamtonbridge@gmail.com) to request a mural.

Funding from the Chenango Co. Arts Council and the Hoyt Foundation has been pivotal in bringing together artists and it has also helped the community recognize the power of public art in the creative life and renaissance of Binghamton. As a result of our experience with this project, we are well poised to tackle larger projects and expand the reach of public art. We have also created an appreciation for public art. For instance, we have had numerous requests for murals on commercial buildings; one was Nancy DiRienzo whose family owns long standing bakery in town and we were able to put her in touch with air brush artist Bruce Greig who painted a mural of bread on the front of her building. The Unitarian Universalist Congregation just put out a call for mural designs for a project they are funding and the Center for Technology and Innovation has contracted with a local artist to paint a mural on their part of the flood wall. Bruce Greig and his BCC students painted a mural on a building at Front and Main Streets and Emily Jablon has created several large scale mosaics.

It's safe to say that public art is contagious in Binghamton.

We want to especially acknowledge the hard work of DPA volunteers: Peg Johnston, Mayumi Park, Shawna "Pepper" Stevenson, Mark Bowers, Diane Lia, Gary Keiser, Judy Salton, M-R Griffin, Frank Evangelisti, Bruce Greig and Kady Perry as well as other volunteers, and of course, all of our talented artists.



