

The Muses

Artists **James E. Todd** and **John Rivera-Resto** were commissioned the difficult task of creating murals for the high wall above the entryway to the ‘Teen Crossings’ wing of the Twinsburg Public Library and for the overstorey section of the nave below the high windows. The scale of the work, the physical demands presented by the architecture, and the hazards of painting directly on the walls as the library conducted its daily business presented a challenge.

After careful consideration, James and John agreed that the best route to take was to produce the art on canvas in the studio and then affixed the pieces to the walls using a traditional technique known as ‘marouflage’.



Their next task was to decide on a theme that would remain timeless and relevant to viewers now -or in 20 years from now. This wing of the library was named ‘Teen Crossings’ in the early planning stages of construction to represent the “bridge” between the children’s room and the adult sections. This proved the germ of an idea.

This conception was literally visualized as a simple suspension footbridge above a canopy of clouds to symbolize life’s transitional journey, with its many challenging twists, thrills and perils, between childhood and adulthood as one travels from peak to peak.

Lastly, the artists envisioned the inclusion of five of the nine mythical muses to inspire and guide the teens through their dreams and passions along the journey. In Greek mythology, the muses inspire those studying the arts, the sciences and philosophy. However, rather than designing traditional renderings of Greek muses, the artists re-imagined the ladies as powerful and beautiful representations of the varied cultures that make up the people of Twinsburg and Northeast Ohio. The result is an elegant, engaging and sophisticated work of art with timeless significance to all those entering Teen Crossings.



The Spirit of Human Endeavor

Within the overstorey of Teen Crossings are ten painted reliefs representing themes about the ‘Spirit of Human Endeavor’. This is a visualization of mankind’s determination to make a serious and sincere effort to achieve something in life, and the desire to explore and understand human passions through the arts, the sciences and world culture. These symbolic “conversation pieces” may inspire teens to study and discover new avocations to enrich their lives.

The themes are: classical literature, discovery and exploration, chivalry, history, medical science, music, popular literature, spirituality and poetry, art – painting, and the Olympic Games. Included at the corners of each relief is a famous personality that best represents each theme.

Can you identify the iconic figures in each relief?



Technique

The Teen Crossings Murals for the Twinsburg Public Library were painted on heavy canvas and then affixed to the walls using adhesive applied in layers to the back of the treated fabric. After stretching the canvas on wooden frames, several priming coats of gray paint were applied with a brush to seal and cure the fabric on both sides. The surface was sanded down between each coating to achieve a smooth and relatively non-absorbent surface. Once the “prep work” was done, the painting stage followed.

The painting techniques used by the artists were the same type of traditional techniques used by painters since the Italian Renaissance. Firstly, the designs (done on computer) were “transferred” to the canvas, then the contours “inked” with liquid acrylic paint, and then sections were “blocked” with water-base paints (like doing sections in a coloring book with solid color) to complete the “under-painting”.

Lastly, the imagery was repainted over in Artist’s oil colors. The paints were applied in thin “glazes” and “scumbling” layers to achieve a convincing tri-dimensional form with good color saturation. Finally, to permanently seal the delicate



glazes, a fine “dusting” of varnish was applied (but only on the muses).

Once dry, the canvases were cut to size, rolled up for transportation, and affixed to the walls.

The two-month commission was completed in July, 2011. This was the artist’s second collaboration following the creation of the dome mural for the new Cuyahoga County Juvenile Justice Center. They both have decades of experience with the brush as well as well-read and trained artistic minds. Jim’s mastery of drawing and painted surfaces and John’s mastery of portraiture and theatrical composition were a good complement in the successful creation of the murals. For this great artistic opportunity, they wish to express their gratitude to Laura Leonard and the Twinsburg Public Library.



The Artists

James E. Todd (b. Jan. 4, 1953) is a Cleveland-born decorative artist specializing in faux finishes, murals, trompe l’oeil, and old-style hand-painted signs. He has worked as set painter in over 30 major Hollywood films. [www.danceswithwalls.com]

John Rivera-Resto (b. Nov. 7, 1958) is a Cleveland-born artist, actor, writer, designer and lecturer regarded by many as one of the top-ten muralists in the United States. He is also the founder of the internationally recognized educational website: Muralmaster®. [www.muralmaster.org]

TWINSBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY TEEN CROSSINGS

The Muses and Spirit of Human Endeavor



Works by

**James E. Todd &
John Rivera-Resto**

2011