

POINTS OF VIEW

Public art connection draws confusion, pride

Rochester is a little worse off and Birmingham is a little better. And it has nothing at all to do with the coming of the Somerset Collection.

In Rochester, a 40-by-20-foot historical mural depicting the city's last trolley which had hung at the corner of Main and University for 14 years is gone.

In Birmingham, a 14-by-5-foot mural by Troy architectural sculptor Glen Michaels entitled "Medieval Tapestry" was dedicated Sept. 27th at the Baldwin Public Library — the gift of Birmingham resident Claudia Ireland.

The Rochester mural was painted by Mike Paradise, when he was an art student at Oakland University. Last Thursday, it was taken down and carted away to make room for display windows for the Varsity Shop.

It hasn't been seen since.

Paradise, a Rochester resident, was no fly-by-night art student. He is now a commercial artist connected with the Center for Creative Studies. The mural is on the state registry for art in public places. He donated a year of his time and artistry, with a former building tenant and local lumber yard supplying the materials.

Through the years, "I've always refurbished it on my own," he said. In the past, plans were to expand it to spell out "Historic Downtown Rochester" and make it a gateway to downtown.

It's certainly too bad to take down such a work. But more upsetting is that a piece of public art may have been destroyed.

No one will say where it is.

Varsity Shop owner Vincent Secontine says building owner Chris Red-



JUDITH DONER BERNE

ing of Franklin Properties took it down.

"What mural?" said Redding, asking that it be described. "That's the first knowledge I have of it."

Then, he amended, "Well, actually I was contacted by another reporter last week."

But Paradise says Redding contacted him recently, asking what should be

done with the mural. He told him there was plenty of time to think about it.

Secontine then said it was the painter who was restoring the building who took the mural away. No, he could not name the painter, but he'd probably be there on the weekend.

"The intent was to seek another wall (for the mural)," Secontine added. "They were supposed to be working with Bob (Donahue) at the DDA."

Donahue says, he has no idea where the mural is. "We are in no way responsible for the mural. I would hope that it's safe."

"My main concern was that if it was taken down that it be handled carefully," the DDA director said. He said he would like to see it put up again "if a wall could be found."

Meanwhile, back in Birmingham, three strangers waiting for the Baldwin

Library to open Tuesday morning had an animated conversation about the new mural.

They spoke of its texture, of its materials, of its changing patterns. They exclaimed at the varied materials: glass, tile, bronze, gold leaf, copper wire, wood, peacock feathers, cutout nails.

"It's hard to explain," says Rochester's Paradise, "but there's something about art in a community that brings it together. It's something we don't want to lose."

Even on a frosty fall morning, waiting for the library to open. Or driving past the corner of Main and University in downtown Rochester.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric.

Arrogant suburbs are confused over city's future

The overwhelming arrogance of the majority population boggles the mind. According to self-titled experts, the future of Detroit depends on real efforts to restore jobs and revamp neighborhoods. The future, say these pompous fat cats, will not begin for Detroit until Coleman Young is put out to pasture and a new mayor installed.

L. Brooks Patterson, darling of the Michigan right, a major spokesman for maintaining the status quo of the city versus us, asserts that Detroit's problems cannot be solved while Young remains the office of mayor. Detroit's finances, its need for reinvestment, cannot be addressed "while the mayor polarizes the community for some perceived advantage," said Patterson.

"When there is a change in administration, I am absolutely convinced that the suburban leaders, investors and legislators — count me among them — will work tirelessly to rebuild Detroit," he continued.

I've got news for Patterson and those who think as he does. There are thousands of people in Detroit working tirelessly right now to revitalize their neighborhoods, invest in the city, cre-

ate viable business and take back their streets from the twin demons of hopelessness and despair.

The arrogance of Patterson and those like him, while serving to insulate them from reality and maintain their veneer of superiority, is what continues to polarize our tri-county area. The smugness of these self-appointed saviors, evidenced by comments like: "I haven't crossed Eight Mile in years" serve to illuminate the ignorance of those who would be king.

Open your eyes

If Patterson and those who follow his divisive lead had crossed Eight Mile into Detroit, if they would descend from their conceited perch of superiority, they might have their eyes and perhaps their mind opened to the realities of present day Detroit.

One reality is Reach Inc., a westside group which has taken back its neighborhood by buying abandoned property, rehabilitating it and renting the homes to those in need. Reach Inc. operates a local restaurant, providing jobs and hope for the future for those who've



JEFFREY MILLER

been lifted from the ranks of the unemployed.

If the suburban demigods of change were to come down from their mountain of prejudice, they might become aware of Victoria Park on the east side of Detroit, a new housing development which sold out in record time. They would know about the group of Detroiters currently renovating a six-block strip of Livernois in the heart of the city and the plans to build a shopping center there. They would be aware of the retail construction planned for the area of Seven Mile and the Lodge Freeway.

A drive across Eight Mile and a tour of neighborhoods would showcase com-

munity groups like U-Snap Back, Operation Get Down, Core City Neighborhoods and the Ravendale project, patrolling their streets, beautifying their neighborhoods, helping the downtrodden and waging the battle now.

The overwhelming arrogance of these white knights implies that they possess the secrets to success; all they need to put their plan in motion is the key to the city they have abandoned in droves for the past 25 years.

Problems still exist

Detroit faces many problems: unemployment, a decreasing tax base, high property taxes, a cutback in the level of city services and isolation by the great community. Coleman Young, whose job it is to manage the city and its resources, has, like many a mayor before him, made mistakes and alienated some potential allies. But people like Patterson — misguided know-it-alls, sowing distrust and animosity — must also share the blame.

Abandoned homes adding to the blight are there due to suburban flight. Oakland and Macomb scofflaws refuse to pay the taxes on dwellings they fled in fear, causing further erosion of the

financial base of the city.

Those who could save the city if only Coleman would retire have first helped to destroy it by ringing Detroit with an invisible taint, denying investment, denying their presence and allowing the city to wither through their indifference.

Detroit is down but by no means out. There is a tremendous life force pulsating there. Most Detroiters will tell you that it is time for a change in leadership — one that will help in their efforts to recharge the city's pulse.

Bigoted outsiders cannot save Detroit. A new mayor will by himself not be able to save the city. Capital to create jobs, employment to erase despair, hope for the future to assist in the drug war and a willingness to actively get involved in change is what is necessary.

I've got news for Patterson and those who echo his views. Coleman Young isn't the problem. People like them are the problem.

Jeffrey Miller, a Southfield resident, is executive producer/host of "Transition," seen locally at 8:30 a.m. on Saturdays on WXON TV 20.

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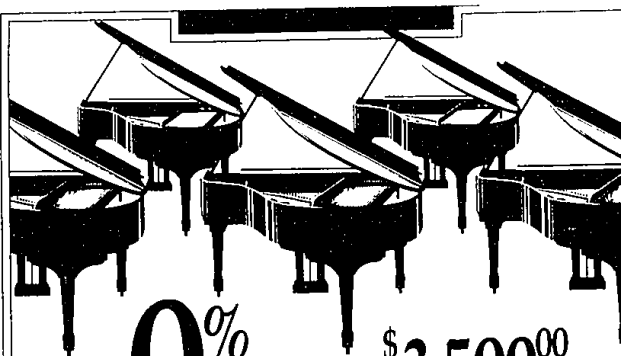
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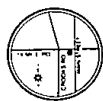
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