

Regional

Murals take on new forms and purposes

Muralism is among the most exciting forms of visual arts – one that has become very common outside the United States and that is gaining popularity here. One of the world's most prominent muralists is Gonzalo "Gonz" Jove.

"Muralism is like an arm of the art world," said Jove. "You are trying to convey a story line. When I am doing my paintings, I'm doing some of the things that are more abstract or something different, something that brings me a different kind of pleasure."

Born in La Paz, Bolivia, Jove obtained his bachelor of fine arts degree from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. He has held dozens of exhibits and has been commissioned to create murals all around the world. As an artist who paints in public areas and at very large scales, he faces challenges unique to the muralist.

"When you are outside painting the mural, you are going to be painting either on concrete or plaster," he explained. "And whenever you are painting, for example, on concrete, you have to add a couple of chemicals into the concrete so that it can absorb the paint. On a mural you also have to take light into consideration. I can only paint until 6 or 7 at night because otherwise it would bring some artificial light and usually the artificial light throws off your color. I prefer painting at a specific time. Normally I start at very early in the morning and between 6 or 7 and then I would continue until 4 or 5 in the afternoon." Because of the size of the murals he creates, Jove also has to deal with issues of dimensions and perspectives for the grids or blown up designs he first makes on paper as a guide for the actual mural.

"There is one particular mural, it is the largest one that we did, is 40-feet tall. We had to do it in pieces," he said. "We didn't really know how it looked until the end, which is quite a challenge."

Needless to say, to paint a large mural takes a lot of time. It took him almost two months for one mural he did that was 24 by 9 feet, and that's not counting time for design and prepara-



Photo courtesy of Gonzalo Jove

Jove at work on a mural.

ration. But the efforts are worth it, Jove said, because for him murals are like storytellers that reflect a lot of the local culture.

"They are trying to tell their story," he said. In the case of Latin America, where murals are extremely popular, the themes are largely social and political.

Because of technology, we may be seeing the emergence of a new type of muralism that does not use the conventional approaches either artistically or thematically, Jove said. In Europe, it has become very popular to project temporary images on buildings at night.

"In fact, they did that in Bolivia a few

times and they did it also out in the country, where there is nothing and they were just trying to project within the background of the sky, which is sort of neat," said Jove. "To me, that's just something else to utilize as a piece of art, which is OK. You can call those temporary murals but I think that's good too

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because you get the people to utilize different media. I consider myself a very traditionalist painter. I like to touch in the field, the paint and the canvas and walls versus going to a computer and coming up with images, but if you are able to transfer your ideas that way I think that's great."

Another challenge for people doing murals is how to make sure that they are preserved. They are, of course, subjected to the outside elements. Is there any special preparation that a muralist needs to do in order to maintain their work through time?

"We learned that with our first mural in La Paz," Jove said. "I had no idea what the weather was like in La Paz, and in the rainy season it rains every day. What we had to do in that matter is that we ended up putting a little ledge over the mural at first, and then since we are at almost 12,000 feet above sea level the sun is a lot hotter and beats up the paint. We came up with two different methods of putting a final coat on the mural itself. In the end we still had to retouch it."

Jove is now working on a project involving SIUE. "It has to do with the College of Arts and Sciences, and that has historical value because there is so much history in the College," Jove said. "When you divide up the subject matter, you are talking about many different subjects that range all the way from economics to history and biology, so you have to do research in all the subjects for you to get a bit of a grasp about what the subject matter is and then you start putting your heart and soul into it."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.