

# MURIRS project brings Sherbrooke to life

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At the time, Malenfant's ambitions included creating a job for himself, introducing history to public spaces, and showing the city and the people that urban renewal could come about through art. His presentations to bureaucrats and politicians focussed on a city park at Dufferin and Frontenac, a spot that was expensive to create and that was... completely empty of people.

Post mural, Malenfant says proudly, the spot is always busy. A mural on Alexandre Street, he points out, convinced the city to place a park next to it. Then the neighbour renovated his apartment building, as it was looking a bit shabby next to the greenspace and the new art. And so on: "The mural has inspired urban design. People in the street are now saying, 'This is my mural!' They are proud of their environment. They are becoming ambassadors and guides to these murals, stopping to talk to tourists on the street."

Malenfant says the last two murals painted cost \$110,000 together — a good investment. Artists are given contract jobs and can use their experience to get attention to sell their own works.



ELEANOR BROWN

*One of the many murals found throughout the city. Can you find it?*

Malenfant and his crew offer a fresco-painting technique that they created themselves for the mural project. Malenfant had no experience with murals, nor

at the trompe l'oeil style, and a huge amount of trial and error went into the project, into discovering the right tools and long-lasting paints. "It took a lot of

work, even the language itself was not there at the beginning for what we were doing. But I was sure of the success of the project." He did look to Chemainus, B.C., for inspiration.

So far, MURIRS' work has covered 1,200 square metres of bare wall, requiring 850 gallons of paint. Some 200 people and animals have been painted, and about 30 artists have been given regular, paid work. And an 11th mural will be unveiled in September.

But is a painted wall really art? Yes, Ann Montgomery says firmly. Montgomery is the president of the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke and the co-chair of Tuesday's star-studded MURIRS supper gala. The museum has also made a commitment to public art, she adds. The grouping of sculptured chairs at the Lac des Nations is a part of the museum's collection, and the institution offers guided tours of outdoor art in the summer.

As for the decision to focus on history, Malenfant says he's creating "a fictional book based on fact. We're taking people from a certain period and creating a non-moving theatrical set."

History is story.