

Yates had to avoid the window theme and develop an original approach.

In 1984, Yates found a way to achieve his goal. By dismissing the frame and painting a series of connecting panels, he produced a linear effect invaluable for picturing the flat, sprawling prairie terrain. Such a series of panels required an unusual amount of space, but the result satisfied Yates: "Now for the first time I felt I was getting beyond that box." Indeed, the prairie landscape is full of space, so why should it not take an inordinate amount of space to communicate that?

With this original concept in tow, Yates approached the north face of the Education Building. He knew immediately that a large mural would go well on that particular wall, but he also realized that producing and affixing such a painting would be a formidable challenge. Indeed, when it finally started, the project became an exercise in problem solving, and was largely a co-operative effort.

Funding was the first problem. However, the University eventually awarded Yates a McCalla Professorship, from a research endowment fund, that freed him from teaching while he worked on the painting project.

Once the project began, technical problems inevitably resulted. A strong, weatherproof material with a paintable surface was required. In consultation with Weldwood, a major forest product manufacturer, Yates chose a fir plywood with a smooth overlaid surface. This product, commonly called crezon and used for making signs, would likely prove the most durable and convenient material in its class for the artist's purpose.

In order to find a way to seal the edges of the crezon and prevent delamination of the plies, Yates sought the advice of Walker Brothers (Burnaby, BC). They eventually concluded that an aluminum-based paint would provide maximum protection from Edmonton's extreme weather. The paint would not only endure drastic and sudden changes in temperature, but would also withstand impacts from hail. As well, an agent was added that would inhibit ultraviolet rays, to keep the colors from fading in bright sunlight. After the edges of the crezon plywood were sealed with this paint, they were

"He is primarily intrigued by the open space and distant horizons..."

ready for Yates' artistic endeavors.

The next step was, of course, to devise a secure system for fastening the completed panels to the concrete wall. Victor Fast, a local architectural technologist and renowned problem-solver, devised a unique set of fasteners. In order to test the fasteners, Yates enlisted the services of Professor Cheng in the Department of Civil Engineering, who created a method for measuring the force ne-

cessary to pull one of the panels from the wall. The contractor that originally erected the Education Building provided a sample of the actual wall to facilitate this testing. Laboratory tests proved twice as successful as expected.

Indeed, the way was paved by early 1987 for Yates to begin painting in earnest. The only real plan the artist had in mind at first was the mural's basic concept and theme. Knowing that he wanted to paint his impression of the western Canadian landscape, he sought to convey some of the space, light, and energy that he sees as unique to this area. According to Yates, his concept "embraced the notion of letting it grow from the center." Therefore, beginning with one panel that would be the center of the mural, he painted each successive segment working outwards in a spiral

"Norman Yates remains undaunted by negative criticisms of his latest mural."

fashion. Working in this way, with no definite preconception of the finished work, let "the painting have a life in the process."

Starting in mid-July, with most of the painting completed, the individual panels were affixed in sequence to the wall. Before this final phase was complete, however, high winds and hail accompanying tornado weather on July 31 gave the fasteners and paint a natural test. Happily, all of the panels held without problem and the paint withstood unusually large hailstones. By mid-August, Yates had seen his project completed. Yates points out that the mural was in no way a one-person project, but a co-operative effort through and through—which seems to please him extremely. Presumably this coming winter will provide one final test of endurance, but Yates remains very optimistic—the co-operative effort so far should ensure its success.

Norman Yates remains undaunted by negative criticisms of his latest mural. For, in fact, he has received many positive reactions as well. Letters of appreciation have come not only from various faculties and departments within the University, but also from businesses and tenants who view the work from the high-rises across the river. According to Yates, the visual excitement that his painting radiates is the "result of a fairly personal statement with impact." What he means, of course, is that this mural is in the first place "not a decoration, but a statement."

Yates' mural indeed purports to do more than embellish. The artist is making a statement about how he sees western Canada. He is optimistic about the West and its future, seeing a certain characteristic energy in a people who tend to take extreme points of view in everything from politics to religion. If it does anything, says Yates, "the mural will hopefully ignite energy."

Story and photo
by Philip Prins

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UNIVERSITY NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT ORGANIZATION

M E E T I N G

Wednesday, September 23, 1987 3:30 p.m.

Business Bldg. Rm. 1-09

A brief business meeting (including election of the 1987-88 executive) will be followed by a guest speaker:

Marie Laing — the MLA for Edmonton-Avonmore, who will discuss the question:

Why a Nuclear-Free Zone in Alberta?

Ms. Laing recently introduced in the Legislative Assembly a resolution which would see Alberta declared a nuclear-free zone. She will also discuss her impressions of the recent World Congress of Women meeting in Moscow which she attended as a delegate of the Congress of Canadian Women.