PHILADELPHIA

MURALS

and the stories they tell

Jane Golden, Robin Rice, and Monica Yant Kinney

with photography by David Graham and Jack Ramsdale

Temple University Press

Philadelphia

chapter 1

"COOL JANE"

PRECEDING PAGES NATIONALLY RENOWNED FIGURE PAINTER SIDNEY GOODMAN LENT ONE OF HIS IMAGES, AS WELL AS HIS TALENTS, TO THE MAKING OF *BOY WITH RAISED ARM*, 40TH STREET AND POWELTON AVENUE. THE MURAL INSPIRED PASSERSBY FOR TEN YEARS UNTIL ITS BUILDING WAS RAZED IN 2002 TO MAKE WAY FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION. MAP IS NEGOTIATING TO RE-CREATE THE MURAL ON THE NEW BUILDING GOING UP ON THE SITE.

In June of 1984, Jane Golden, a young muralist from Margate, New Jersey, by way of California, brought her talents to the streets of Philadelphia to head up what was then envisioned as a modest six-week youth program within Mayor Wilson Goode's brand new Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network. Back then, those who conceived the program could not have imagined how it would grow, under the unflagging energy and determination of one woman, into one of the most prolific and innovative public art programs in the country.

Today, Jane and the more than two thousand murals painted under her program's direction have become an enduring part of the Philadelphia scenery, adding a new dimension to the city's character and bringing inspiration and hope to some of its ailing neighborhoods.

Murals: Where do they come from, where do they go?

Mural painting has its roots deep in human history. Beginning with the earliest cave paintings, drawing on walls has been a compelling form of public expression, helping us capture and remember important community experiences.

Because of their intrinsic bond to architecture and the relative ease of making them, murals are among the most accessible of all public art forms. As such, they have been used over the years for a multitude of purposes: to convey the official values of government and religion to give voice to the unempowered, and to commemorate important historic or civic events. They also have filled a purely aesthetic function, serving the public's need for art that simply pleases the eye through color and form.

In the United States of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most architectural murals were government commissioned and made by officially sanctioned artists. Today's murals, however, generally derive their authority from another source—the public will. For example the subject matter for many of Philadelphia's murals arises directly out of dialogues with

neighborhood residents. The murals' themes and symbols, even their aesthetic, reflect the concerns and character of the communities for which they are created. This grassroots genesis is both a strength and a vulnerability: Contemporary murals achieve an immediacy and relevance untouched by other forms of public art, but they are also more vulnerable to change.

Just as the symbolism of some historic artworks may seem baffling today and their styles overwrought, so too, contemporary urban murals occasionally lose relevance over time. Sometimes the dominant religious or ethnic character of a neighborhood changes. A theme that was meaningful for one group may not have the same significance for new residents. Sometimes a mural's visual style doesn't wear well. Natural selection kicks in. After fifteen to twenty years, a mural will begin to deteriorate and fade away unless there is active interest in preserving it.

MAP does all it can to preserve Philadelphia's best murals (including some painted before the city mural program began), but through lack of money, lack of interest, or the decisions of property owners, a number are lost each year.

THE USE OF ALLEGORY TO COMMUNICATE COMPLEX THEMES IS STILL A POPULAR MURAL DEVICE. IN *COLORS OF LIGHT*, LOCATED AT 12TH AND VINE STREETS IN CHINATOWN, ARTIST JOSH SARANTITIS HAS USED AN ANCIENT SCROLL, A DRAGON, CHILDREN, AND A WOMAN'S FACE LOOKING OUTWARD TO DEPICT THE CONTINUOUS FLOW OF ASIAN HERITAGE FROM THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE.

A legacy of murals

Philadelphia's murals draw on a long legacy, not only in their commemoration of shared events and experiences but also in their specific themes. In particular, popular genres of nineteenth- and twentieth-century public painting live on in contemporary murals.

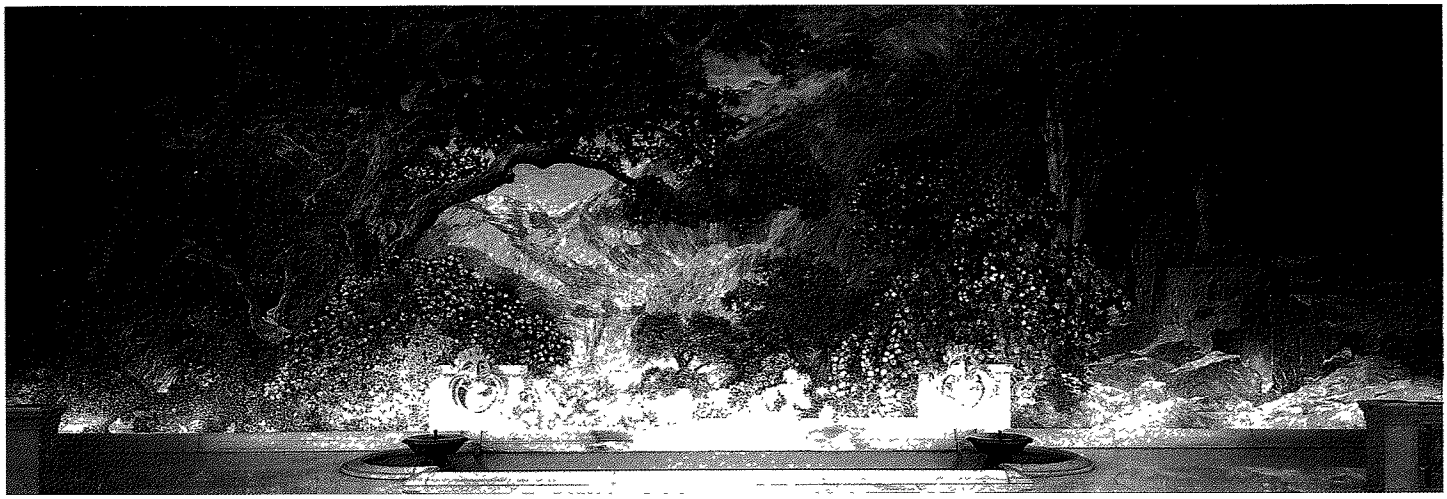
The most ambitious and esteemed category of nineteenth-century painting was "history painting"—the heroic depiction of uplifting and inspiring narratives. In Europe and the United States, these mural-size paintings were a favorite form of wholesome public entertainment, and the successful ones toured from city to city accompanied by explanatory literature. They inspired sermons and debates, just as many of today's murals do. A good example is Benjamin West's apocalyptic historical allegory, *Death on the Pale Horse* (1817, see below). When it was shown in London and later at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where it is still a central exhibit, it was viewed by a vast and enthusiastic audience.

MANY CONTEMPORARY MURALS FOCUS ON HEROIC OR HISTORICAL THEMES, SHARING ROOTS WITH SUCH POPULAR NINETEENTH CENTURY ALLEGORICAL PAINTINGS AS *DEATH ON THE PALE HORSE* BY BENJAMIN WEST.

A contemporary example of allegorical painting is Josh Sarantitis's *Colors of Light: Gateway to Chinatown* (12th and Vine Streets, 2000, see p. 21), which symbolically depicts new generations carrying Chinese heritage and values into the future. The different parts of the composition are united by a colorful dragon, ruler of heaven and a symbol of power and fortune. The dragon's body weaves in and out of the boundaries of the wall assisted by attached wooden supports that enable the painted image to extend into the air. The mural was dedicated in 2000, the year of the dragon.

There are also numerous precedents for today's murals that examine and celebrate aspects of community history. In her book, *Public Art in Philadelphia,* Penny Bach notes that during the Great Depression, Robert E. Larter was asked to paint a subject of local Philadelphia history for his 1938 mural, *Iron Plantation Near Southwark, 1800,* commissioned by the Treasury Department Section of Fine Arts for the Southwark Post Office.

A prized local example of the regional landscape genre—an enduring, worldwide mural theme—is *The Dream Garden* (6th and Walnut Streets, see next page). Designed by Philadelphia graphic artist and muralist Maxfield Parrish and executed as a mosaic by Louis Comfort Tiffany in 1916, this idyllic scene still decorates the beautiful lobby of the Curtis Building (former home of the offices of the publisher of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies Home Journal*). *The Dream Garden* was designed as the centerpiece of a public area that includes a fountain and seating.



THE DREAM GARDEN, DESIGNED BY MAXFIELD PARRISH AND CRAFTED BY LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY IN 1916, IS AN HISTORIC EXAMPLE OF HOW MURALS CAN ENLIVEN AND ENRICH THEIR SURROUNDINGS. IT IS LOCATED AT 6TH AND WALNUT STREETS IN THE CURTIS BUILDING.

Similarly, outdoor murals often serve as integral components of larger environments. A community garden in the North Kensington section of Philadelphia offers walkways, flowers, and a cool blue vista of mountains and lake as a respite from the surrounding expanse of barren city blocks. Another example of a mural that successfully merges with its environment is Tish Ingersoll's luminous *Tuscan Landscape* (32nd and Spring Garden Streets, 1994, see p. 24), which seems to effortlessly embrace its surroundings, including the homeowner's hammock, in a panorama of golden light, its Italian arcade, and receding hills.

Today, MAP receives frequent requests for murals that depict historical scenes significant to the community. Puerto Rican residents of Norris Square wanted images from the history of Puerto Rico to teach their children about their cultural origins. The mural that was painted there is now known locally as *Raices* (Roots, see p. 70). Another mural in the Strawberry Mansion section of the city entitled *Black American Gothic* (Jane Golden, 21st and York Streets, 1990, see p. 139) recalls the rural southern background of many of that neighborhood's elders as a reminder to the younger residents growing up in an urban environment.

Artist Michael Webb was asked to come up with a theme related to Philadelphia's history for the untitled mural on the Beasley Building in Center City (12th and Walnut Streets, 1997, see p. 25). Determined to avoid what he calls a "cliché about [Benjamin] Franklin and Betsy Ross," Webb created instead an elaborate scene of modern-day workers designing and constructing a building that alludes to the city's past, including a vignette that relates to the casting of Alexander Milne Calder's gigantic statue of William Penn, which tops City Hall.

Following a long artistic tradition, portraits of real people are often incorporated into today's murals, heightening their significance to the community. The majority of these portraits are of local citizens—community leaders, residents, or neighborhood children who are singled out for special tribute or just as models. To create their two murals celebrating

TISH INGERSOLL'S *TUSCAN LANDSCAPE*, AT 32ND AND SPRING GARDEN STREETS. FITS COMFORTABLY INTO ITS URBAN SURROUNDINGS, EMBRACING EVEN THE HOMEOWNER'S HAMMOCK.

the annual *Black Family Reunion* (40th Street and Girard Avenue, 1988; 20th and Watkins Streets, 1993). Jane Golden and Dietrich Adonis borrowed images from residents' family photograph albums. The *Casa di Pazzo* mural in South Philadelphia (12th and Federal Streets, 1999), painted by David Guinn and Barbara Smolen, is based on treasured vintage photographs of people who grew up together in the neighborhood and now belong to the same social club.

Other murals celebrate native sons and daughters who have achieved public fame or made a significant contribution to the community. They include musical entertainers such as *Mario Lanza* (Diane Keller, Broad and Reed Streets, 1997, see p. 102), and Marian Anderson and the Heath Brothers in *People of Point Breeze* (David McShane, 1541 S. 22nd Street, 1998, see p. 26); famous athletes such as *Jackie Robinson* (David McShane, 2803 N. Broad Street, 1997, see p. 129); and *Wilt Chamberlain* (John Lewis, 1234 Vine Street, 2001). Social activists and political figures are also honored, including *Roxanne Jones* (William Freeman, Broad and Clearfield Streets, 1997, repainted by Peter Pagast in 2000), the first black woman to serve in Pennsylvania's state legislature. Jones was a staunch advocate for Philadelphia's disenfranchised. Pagast also painted the portrait of activist entertainer *Paul Robeson* (4502 Chestnut Street, 1999, see p. 35).

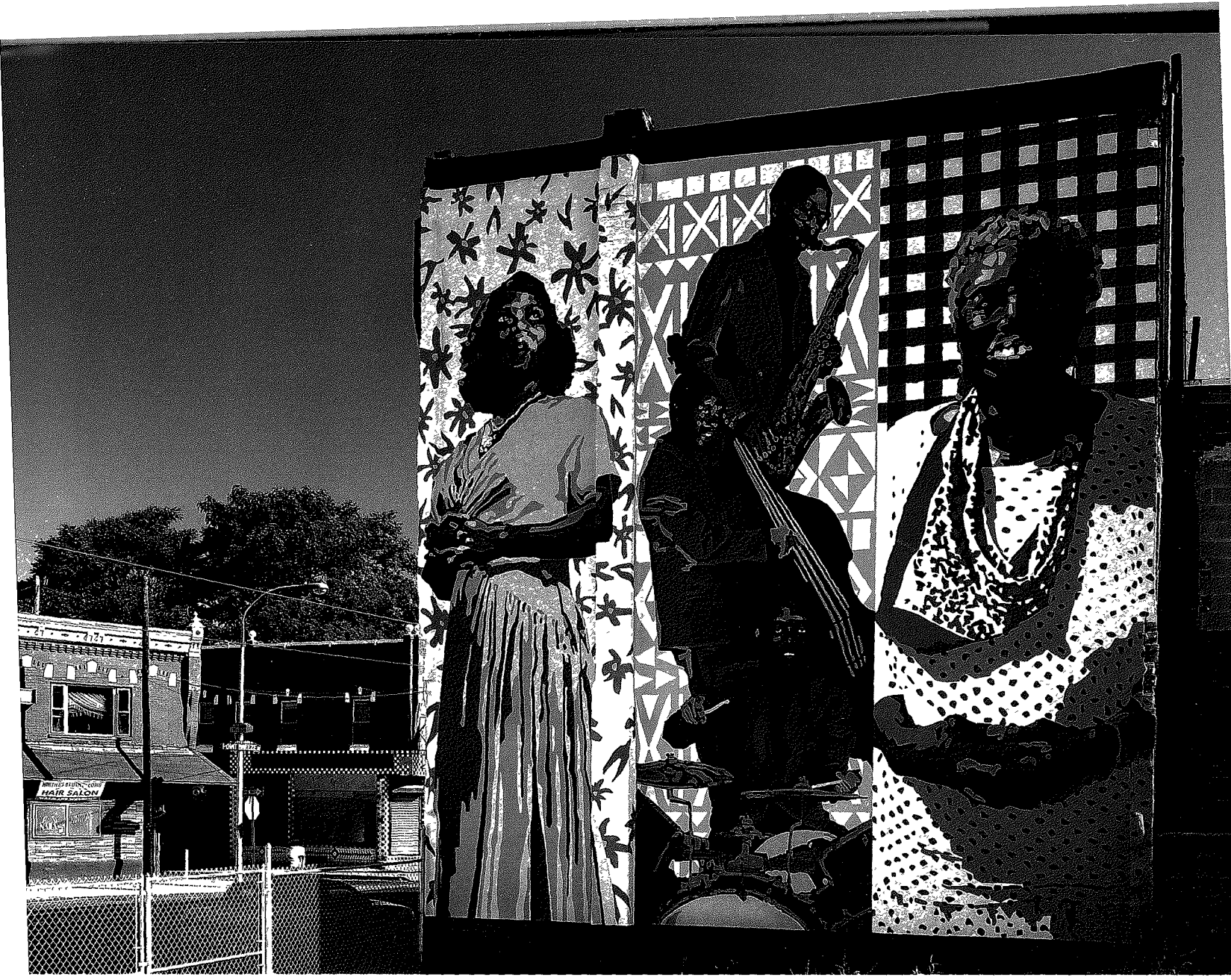
Allegories speak to our moral and spiritual aspirations. Beautiful landscapes satisfy our longing for a moment of peace in hectic urban surroundings. Historical scenes remind us of our journeys and why we are what we are today. And portraits, whether formal tributes to eminent individuals or informal likenesses of our neighbors, help to show us who we are, even as we grow and change. In these ways and many others, murals offer us a wide range of perspectives—on the world around us and into ourselves.

Urban problems—urban outreach

Philadelphia's contemporary mural movement began in the 1970s, when artists Don Kaiser and Clarence Wood became coordinators of the Environmental Art Program for the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Urban Outreach Department and began to include community murals among their many activities. Inaugurated by David Katzive and continued under the leadership of Penny Bach, the program received international recognition in 1972 when one of its murals, thought at that time to be the largest ever, appeared on the cover of *Paris Match.* Designed by Washington Color School artist Gene Davis, *Franklin's Footpath* consisted of eighty different colored stripes, each 11 inches wide and 414 feet long. The mural was painted directly on the street, covering a large section of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in front of the art museum.

By the time the Environmental Art Program ended in 1983, Kaiser and Wood had painted more than one hundred walls in Philadelphia neighborhoods. Their work included jungle waterfalls, various compositions incorporating portraits of local children, and even enlargements of children's dinosaur drawings for a school on Lancaster Avenue.

INCORPORATING ELEMENTS FROM MANY OF THE CITY'S BEST-KNOWN MONUMENTS, THIS UNTITLED MURAL BY MICHAEL WEBB AT 12TH AND WALNUT STREETS CELEBRATES PHILADELPHIA'S ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY USING THE ALLEGORY OF AN IMAGINARY BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION.



DAVID MCSHANE'S *PEOPLE OF POINT BREEZE*, 1541 S. 22ND STREET, IS ONE OF MANY MURALS HONORING NEIGHBORHOOD STARS, PAST AND PRESENT. THIS ONE PAYS TRIBUTE TO MARIAN ANDERSON, THE HEATH BROTHERS, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVIST MAMIE NICHOLS.

Together, Kaiser and Wood developed a mural process model that included in-depth community meetings in which local residents were invited to suggest themes and even submit mural designs. The two artists avoided proposing subject matter to the community or steering them toward any particular design. While Wood and Kaiser's community process model was more leisurely and open-ended than that followed by the Mural Arts Program today, its spirit and many of its strategies live on in the commitment to seek the input and approval of communities in which murals are painted.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Philadelphia was a city troubled by gang warfare and graffiti. By the 1970s, gangs were weaker, but a large percentage of the graffiti was still gang related. The fact that murals were rarely attacked by graffiti writers suggested that murals could be part of a solution—not to the gangs themselves but to the plague of wall writing. Wood and Kaiser never saw their mission as combating graffiti, but in the 1980s, Mayor Wilson Goode's Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network did.

Combating the lure of graffiti

Goode based his citywide effort on a modest neighborhood program, the Anti-Graffiti Task Force, developed by Tim Spencer, the young director of the Haverford Recreation Center in West Philadelphia. Spencer's friendly style attracted teenagers to the program; among them was Theodore A. Harris, who today describes himself as the former "poster boy" for the task force. Harris was always fascinated by art, especially surrealism and abstract expressionism. He entered the graffiti subculture at age thirteen because kids he knew were doing it.

In those days, wall writers organized competing organizations. "I formed a club with one of my graffiti mentors, MEKA [his tag]. He taught me how to print my name and gave me a 'style,' in other words. My graffiti name was KNIFE. MEKA was the president of the club, and I think I was the vice president." The club was called "EUL I" for "Experience UnLimited I."

"The whole thing with graffiti is to get away with what you're doing and to leave something of beauty," Harris explains. Today the grown-up Harris retains a certain appreciation for the elongated arches of the classic Philadelphia "wicket style" of tagging. But young Harris found that Spencer's task force ultimately offered more than the excitement of graffiti clubs.

"People donated markers, boards, and art supplies, and young folks who were wall writers came together in a nearby church to do work for a traveling exhibition of our graffiti art," Harris recalled. "We had a good time doing that, and Tim came up with the idea of organizing a show at Makler Gallery," then a prestigious commercial gallery in Center City. Although the traveling exhibition never happened, the Philadelphia exhibit attracted a lot of local attention. It included paintings by young people like Harris, as well as work by established New York graffiti artists, including Lady Pink, Dondi, and Futura 2000.

Spencer also organized neighborhood efforts to clean up graffiti. Although murals were not central to the mission of his task force, one of them garnered national attention for the program when a story about it appeared in *USA Today,* with Harris's picture on the front page. "I was always talking to the press," Harris recalled. "I was the person they put out front, saying things like: 'We changed his life, and we can change yours, too.'"

The mayor's solution

Like Spencer, Mayor Goode chose the carrot over the stick. His plan for eradicating graffiti focused on rewarding correct behavior, although the possibility of prosecution was never abandoned. Philadelphia's teenage wall writers received amnesty from prosecution for earlier graffiti crimes in return for signing a promise to give up graffiti. They called it "The Pledge."

PRECEDING PAGES MAX MASON'S CLEVER USE OF TROMPE L'OEIL HELPS TO INTEGRATE REAL AND PAINTED ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS IN THIS BUSY SCENE DEPICTING *A DAY IN THE LIFE OF WEST PHILADELPHIA*, 2000, AT 4008 CHESTNUT STREET.

Goode broadened graffiti-removal efforts and expanded Spencer's program of art workshops to include potential youth employment. After working at volunteer jobs such as cleaning and preparing walls for repainting, former writers were eligible for paid jobs with the city. Almost as an afterthought, a mural or two were proposed to help celebrate the hoped-for success of the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network, as the new independent citywide program was called. However, in future years, the opportunity to paint murals would become the key to success for many more young people.

See Jane paint!

While graffiti ran rampant in Philadelphia, the person who would become the Anti-Graffiti Network's artistic director was learning her trade in Los Angeles. Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Jane Golden grew up in Margate, New Jersey, on the Atlantic Coast. She attended Stanford University where she majored in art and minored in political science. After graduation, she moved to Los Angeles to, in her words, "try to figure out what I could do with a B.A. in art."

Jane had always been enamored of murals. As a child, she studied the work of Diego Rivera, who played a pivotal role in the Mexican mural renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. She also admired the Works Project Administration and other state-sponsored art programs of the Great Depression. She believed, and continues to believe, that art can be a tool for social transformation. When she learned of grants sponsored by the Citywide Mural Project in Los Angeles, Jane realized what she had to do with her art degree.

"I was always intrigued with murals," she said, "because they are able to break down barriers about where art should and should not be."

Though she had never painted a mural and the deadline had already passed, Jane boldly sent in her application, exaggerating her experience. On her own, she located an available wall in Santa Monica. "I called the Mural Project on a daily basis for months," she laughs. "I drove them crazy until they gave [a grant] to me." In an almost Cubist manner, Jane's first mural, *Ocean Park Pier* (Ocean Park Boulevard and Main Street, Santa Monica, CA, 1976), records a scene from an earlier era of a pier that no longer exists. Even though the work has been documented in at least seven books and the building site has been declared a historic landmark, Jane was more moved by the fact that "people felt that *they* owned the mural. They responded in ways that were very personal. Senior citizens remembered the pier, and the young people who had only heard of it wanted to see what it was like."

With this large project under her belt, Jane then followed through with seven years of commissions and residencies in the Los Angeles area. She painted jungle scenes in children's rooms and murals, including a copy of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus,* on the bottom of swimming pools. The well-known photorealist-muralist Kent Twitchell hired her as an assistant on

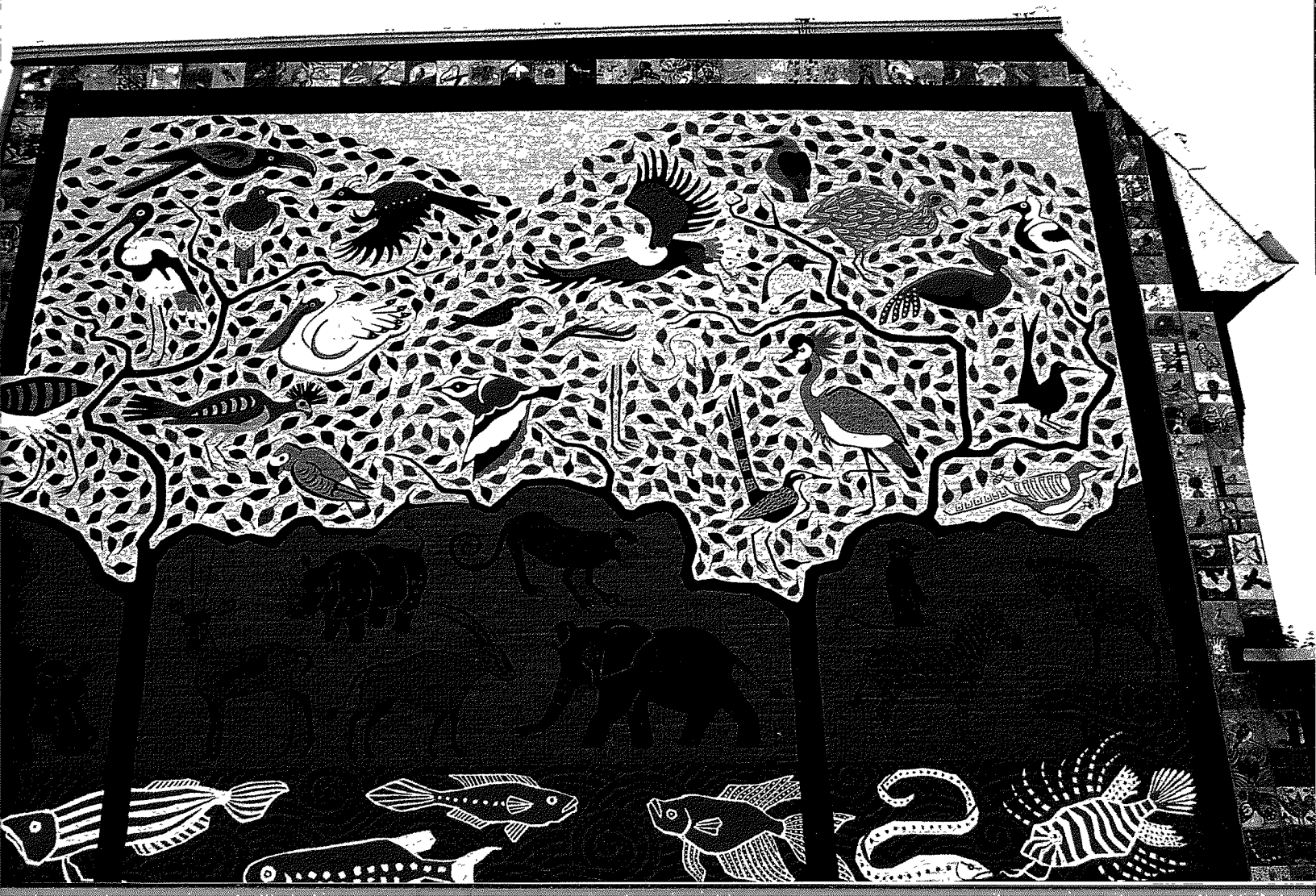
one of his large portrait murals. She also organized a nonprofit group of independent muralists who worked with at-risk kids.

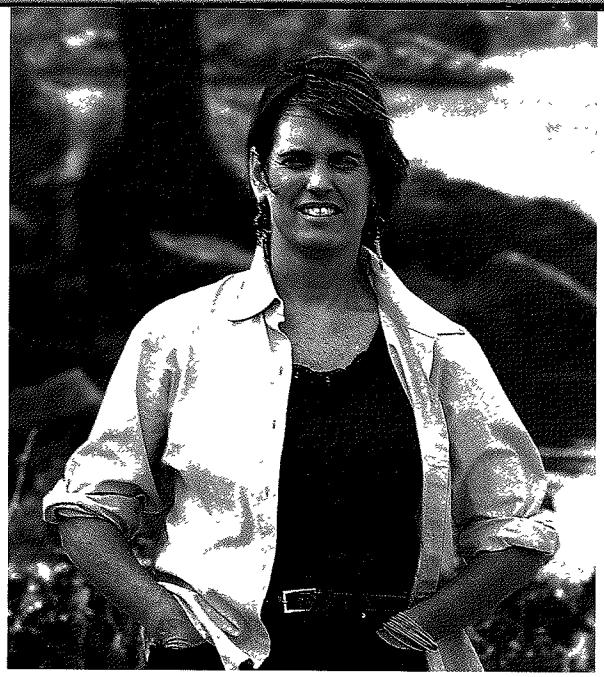
Unexpected walls

Her career as a muralist was progressing well when Jane noticed she was sick. She felt as if she had the flu all the time, with fevers, aches, and red patches on her face. Worst of all, she could hardly use her hands. In the fall of 1983, the twenty-seven-year-old artist was diagnosed with lupus, a chronic disease affecting the immune system, joints, nervous system, and skin. Jane decided to return home to the Jersey Shore so she could participate in a highly regarded treatment program at then-Hahnemann Medical Center in nearby Philadelphia.

Battling lupus will always restrict Jane's activities. "A bad cold can turn into a real crisis," she admits, "but I try not to let lupus limit me." Although exposure to the sun can trigger a systemic response, including joint pain and fatigue, Jane believes "murals have been helpful in combating the chronic pain, because I love the work and I can immerse myself in it. The doctors complain that I push myself a bit too much, but they concur that I'm the healthiest lupus patient they have."

ARTIST EUHRI JONES'S *AFRICAN WILDLIFE*, 2001, AT 4947 LOCUST STREET, EVOKES A COLORFUL ANIMAL KINGDOM FAR FROM THE STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA.





TISH INGERSOLL

"Heat is the worst thing about mural painting. It wears on you. This summer when I was painting on a wall that faced east, I was thinking I was a wuss, but I took a thermometer—It was 115 degrees," Tish Ingersoll recalls with remembered surprise. "After a while, I couldn't think clearly. I was having trouble figuring out perspective. I thought I was a little gaga. I went to my doctor, and he said I was getting dehydrated, that I should drink not water but Gatorade."

Primarily a studio painter and teacher, Ingersoll is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She already knew she wanted "to experiment with murals" when she met Jane through a friend. She volunteered her services to the city. In the spring of 1993, Jane offered Ingersoll a wall at 32nd and Spring Garden Streets, a location with a lot of automobile and pedestrian traffic. "People stop by, but they're not from the neighborhood," the artist observed. Ingersoll's lush *Tuscan Landscape* (restored 1999, see p. 24) on that corner is one of the city's signature murals and often photographed, partly because the scale of the arcade in the foreground interacts so effectively with nearby cars and people.

So far, she has done six murals for the city. "My work is usually about landscape and getting into a beautiful place. People like to be reminded of that," Ingersoll believes. She likes to discuss ideas for a proposed mural with community residents. "I can let my ego go a little bit and accommodate [others' ideas] and not lose my integrity as an artist. There's a balance."

At 420 feet, Ingersoll's *Manayunk Views* (Ridge Avenue and Main Street, 1997, see next page) is one of Philadelphia's longest murals. The cement rampart on which it is painted stands at the lower end of "The Wall," Manayunk's famously steep hill that makes or breaks many a cyclist competing in Philadelphia's annual First Union U.S. Pro-Championship bike race. Because Ingersoll's mural would serve as part of the background for this international athletic event—reaching audiences around the world—it offered an exceptional opportunity to say something about Philadelphia.

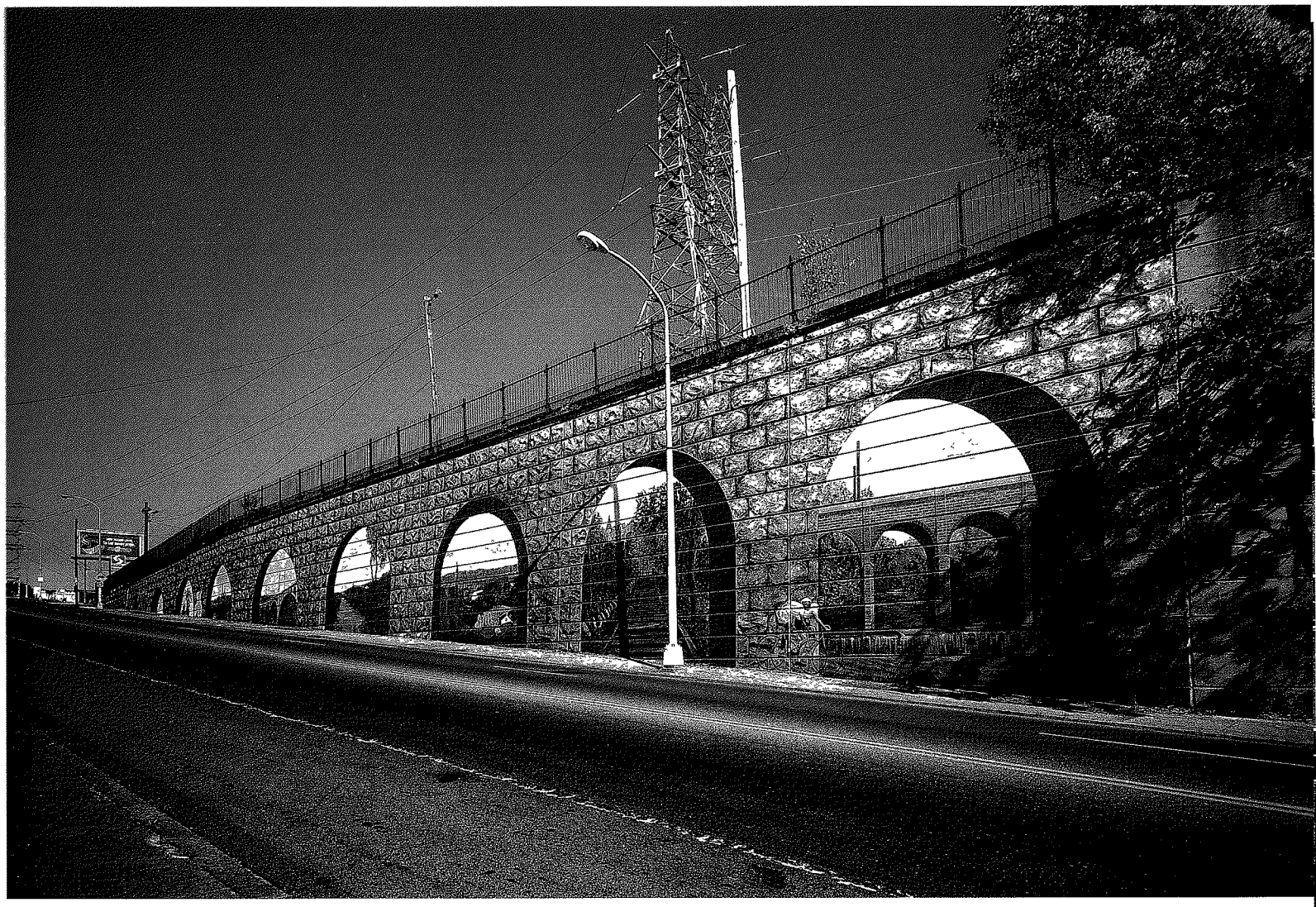
Manayunk, a historic working-class factory community, has recently attracted younger, professional residents, as well as fashionable restaurants, gift shops, and other businesses that appeal to visitors. Ingersoll describes her initial discussions with Manayunk residents as "kind of dicey. A lot of people were skeptical. They didn't want something political, and they thought it was going to be a huge eyesore. There was a man [at a community meeting] who said, 'I think murals are the equivalent of a boom box.'" When Ingersoll mentioned Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, the skeptic snapped, "I lived in Mexico, and I hated Diego Rivera."

However, Ingersoll persevered. "By the last meeting, I came to the front of the audience and showed my drawing and explained the thought process behind the drawing, and they were okay with the explanation." In a comic twist, Ingersoll's design was embraced too ardently by one resident who announced his intention to put it on a T-shirt and refused to understand that murals are copyrighted works of art.

Ingersoll likes to frame her landscapes in an architectural setting. For the Manayunk mural, she chose the arched supports of a bridge, which seem to be holding up the roadway above. The bridge's arches, painted to simulate rusticated stone in a nod to Manayunk's Victorian past, frame a series of lush local vistas.

The scenes in each arch are subtly unified through the use of color and the horizontal continuity of the summer sky, vegetation, and flowing water. A bridge over Wissahickon Creek leads to the central triad of views. A steep flight of steps ascending to a historic Victorian mansion flanks an aerial view of the town nestled among steep hills. A bucolic scene of the Manayunk canal, once an important means of transporting goods to and from the town's textile mills, mirrors the receding linear perspective of the Victorian steps in the next scene over. The sequence concludes with the Green Lane Bridge over the Schuylkill River.

Working on thirty-foot scaffolding, Ingersoll had help on the mural, but she did most of the painting herself over a period of six months. The community showed its appreciation for *Manayunk Views* by asking the artist to paint *The History of Industry and Canals in Manayunk* (4400 Main Street, 1999). For this mural, she worked with local school children and spent a lot of time researching the textile industry. Ingersoll says the big *Manayunk Views* project



changed her painting. "It made my gestures very spontaneous. Now, when I'm working on small things, I trust my brain to be working with my hand better."

"For me, it's been an enriching experience to go to the public level. It's made my message more of a universal message, which in the long run is what I am as an artist. I want people to think when they look at my work. I want a reaction, and I want them to understand what I'm trying to say. The murals have not only helped me understand the city better, but also to understand a universal feeling about certain things. I am so grateful that I've had this opportunity because it's helped my work."

MANAYUNK VIEWS, RIDGE AVENUE AND MAIN STREET.

As her symptoms gradually improved, Jane started working in one of her parent's China Outlet/Gourmet Garage stores and ended up painting a view of the Atlantic City Boardwalk on the side of the store in Somers Point, New Jersey. In June 1984, a friend told her about the mayor's new graffiti-abatement program. Following a positive interview with Oliver Franklin, then deputy city representative for arts and culture and a former filmmaker familiar with her work in Los Angeles, Jane was hired by Tim Spencer along with two others to coordinate a six-week summer youth program.

"I was not hired to paint but to work with the kids part time every day from nine to twelve. I was still living at home in Margate, and in the afternoons I'd work on my mural there or paint down at the Shore," Jane recalled. "Tim had alluded to the fact that the three people who were hired for the summer program would compete for a full-time position in the fall. At the end of the six weeks, I told Tim how I really wanted to paint murals. Just at that time, we were driving over the Spring Garden Street Bridge, which was *covered* with graffiti, and he asked if I could do murals on both sides of the bridge with kids from [the] Mantua [section of West Philadelphia]. He asked if I could finish them in three weeks so they could be dedicated on Labor Day. Tim later said that Wilson Goode had told him, 'If that girl can do it, it will be a miracle,' and that I would get the full-time job. So, I did what I do best: I can out-work anybody!"

"Really, it wasn't about art, it was about the fact that kids were doing something productive for their community."

Located in sight of the majestic Philadelphia Museum of Art, the bridge was enclosed by six-foot-high corrugated metal walls, each six hundred feet long and utterly unsuitable for mural painting. The roughly joined metal sheets sizzled in the August sun as Jane and her teenage helpers applied gallons of chalky green, beige, "Ranch Red," and "Crisp Blue" house paint with clumsy brushes.

"I kept running to the art supply store to buy these little pints of acrylic paint to tint the house paint. I started painting at six in the morning and worked seven days a week into the night. I would sketch, sketch, sketch—and the kids filled in tremendous areas with paint. I had teams of kids. The total number must have been around one hundred. I loved the kids and really bonded with them. I had a great time!"

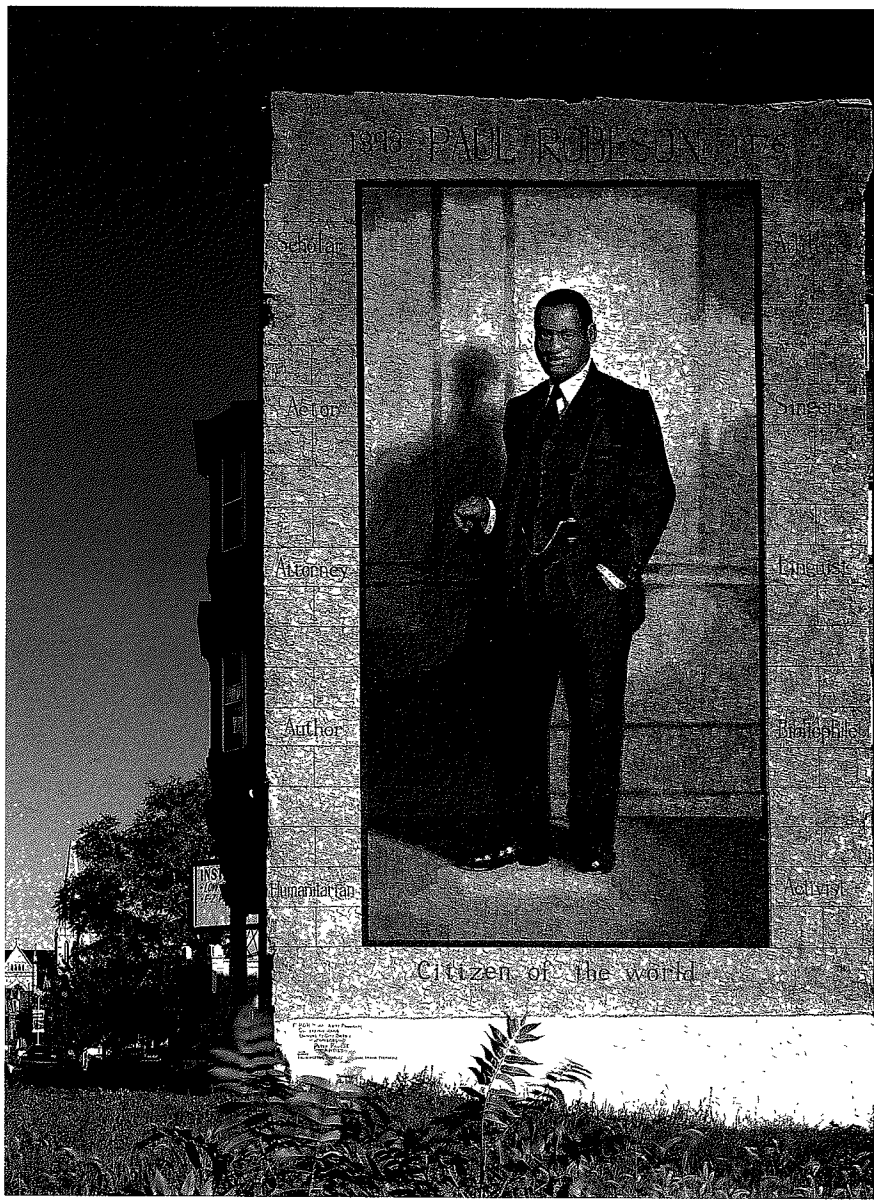
The difficult conditions, poor materials, and inexperience of the painters ensured that the Spring Garden Street Bridge mural (which has since been repainted in part) would have a naive charm at best, but Philadelphians saw it as a major improvement to the busy thoroughfare. "People loved it. The kids were seen as heroes. I remember people pulling over and stopping traffic on the bridge, beeping and waving, and the kids taking bows. Really, it wasn't about art, it was about the fact that kids were doing something productive for their community." At the end of the summer, Jane was invited to join the Anti-Graffiti program's full-time staff.

Street savvy

Initially, Jane was the only professional artist and the only person with a college degree on a staff of ten or so field representatives. She recalls her colleagues as "grassroots guys with street savvy and a lot of charisma." The legendary local wall writer Cornbread, famous for tagging an airplane and an elephant with his peace sign, even took a job with "the Anti's," as the program was called on the street. A few of the field reps were just out of prison.

Each rep was assigned to a neighborhood and worked with the police to recruit wall writers for the program. As one former writer explained, "If you knew they were looking for you and you didn't come into the office and join up, you'd be in trouble."

Jane invited young people to join the program when she made presentations in schools and other community locations. Some would-be Diego Riveras were referred by the courts, and others were pressured into joining. Not all were former writers. Many simply wanted the opportunity to paint or joined at the suggestion of their teachers. "We give the kids a chance to use their talents properly instead of illegally," Jane explained in the late 1980s, when the education program was at its height. Looking back, "one aspect of Anti-Graffiti was the reality of having kids learn about discipline and responsibility. Many had limited options. We hoped they would come out of the program with a sense of their own identities and values so they could go on to live normal lives and not end up dead or in jail."



NOT FAR FROM HIS HOME, THIS STRIKING PORTRAIT OF PAUL ROBESON, PAINTED IN 1999 BY PETER PAGAST AT 4502 CHESTNUT STREET, REMINDS US OF THE MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THIS MULTITALENTED PHILADELPHIAN.

"I'm glad that program came along and was there for people who were serious about changing their ways," said Rocco Albano, a writer once known as PEZ and also as NOT (Number One Terrorist). For this young man, as for many others, graffiti was inextricably intertwined with drugs and alcohol. He believes his "addiction to graffiti" was the hardest of the three to kick.

Now in his thirties, Albano works as an Internet consultant. He credits a twelve-step recovery process for much of his turnaround, but he also feels that Jane and the program were crucial supports that were there when he needed them. "Quitting graffiti was a

gradual process. Unconditional acceptance made it possible. I got to a time where I realized that what Jane was offering was better," he said.

Jane liked the kids and relished her growing knowledge of the raw side of city life. She was impressed with the power of Goode's vision. "At the 1984 press conference introducing the Anti-Graffiti Network to Philadelphia, Wilson Goode had five hundred kids from all over town taking The Pledge," she recalled. "Of course, they weren't *all* going to stop writing on walls. Maybe they didn't even *plan* to stop writing on walls. They were there because they knew they could possibly get a job. They were going to do whatever it took."

Today, most murals in Philadelphia are painted by professional artists. Young people often participate, but in carefully controlled ways. In the Anti-Graffiti days, kids had a larger role in many murals and the results reflected their lack of training. Jane, who was later named artistic director of the program (Tim Spencer was the executive director), led art workshops, designed murals, and supervised the kids who worked on them. "I liked it, though it was chaotic," she reminisces.

Jane was also delighted with the warm reception she received while painting in a variety of impoverished and neglected Philadelphia neighborhoods. "There's something about doing a mural that's different from other art; you have to be in people's homes, getting paint, using their water, developing relationships. I expected to encounter more racism than I did. In one black area, I remember the neighbors inviting us to lunch every day. And when the [black] guys on the crew weren't with me, they'd still invite me to lunch. I wasn't sure that would happen. I think murals have an interesting power to transcend hostility and racial barriers. I don't want to sugarcoat it, but it is an interesting dynamic."

The write stuff

Jane's first assistant was a former writer who had the tag TRAN. She quickly realized that TRAN and another field rep familiar with the drug scene were her ticket to the graffiti world. "We went to a drug corner, and the field rep's friend goes, 'That's C K. That's Dan. That's Louie-Louie.' Those were their tag names. We got out of the car, and the field rep went up to C K, who was holding a car stereo in his hand, and asked, 'What've you got there C K?'

"He looked down at the ground and said, 'We just stole this.'

"I said, 'C K, have you ever thought about a career change? Do you want to paint a mural with us?'

"He said, 'Where's that going to be?' Then all the guys he was with started to gather around.

"I said, 'It's at 5th and Allegheny, if you're not afraid to work on scaffolding.'" Jane was well aware that the young men were attracted to danger.

"And," she added, "there's pay, but you've got to sign The Pledge."

Intrigued, C K put down the stereo. He joined Anti-Graffiti and stayed with the program for two years.

Jane, who fantasized about being a spy as a child, felt a special satisfaction in infiltrating the network of writers and graffiti gangs and befriending people like the writer LOS, who led a graffiti club called the High Class Lunatics. "It was 23 degrees. I met him late at night in a rough neighborhood behind a recreation center to talk about painting murals," Jane recalled. "He was very skeptical at first. I was white. I was not from the neighborhood. I was talking about not using spray paint. I clearly had everything going against me, *but* I was clearly sincere. I remember thinking, 'Oh boy, am I naive!'

"People now talk about how difficult it is to reach kids between the ages of twelve and eighteen. That's who we had back then. It's no mystery," Jane insisted. "In order to connect with kids, you have to be emotionally present, physically present, and paying attention to them in a personal way."

"People now talk about how difficult it is to reach kids between the ages of twelve and eighteen. That's who we had back then. It's no mystery," Jane insisted. "In order to connect with kids, you have to be emotionally present, physically present, and paying attention to them in a personal way."

PEZ

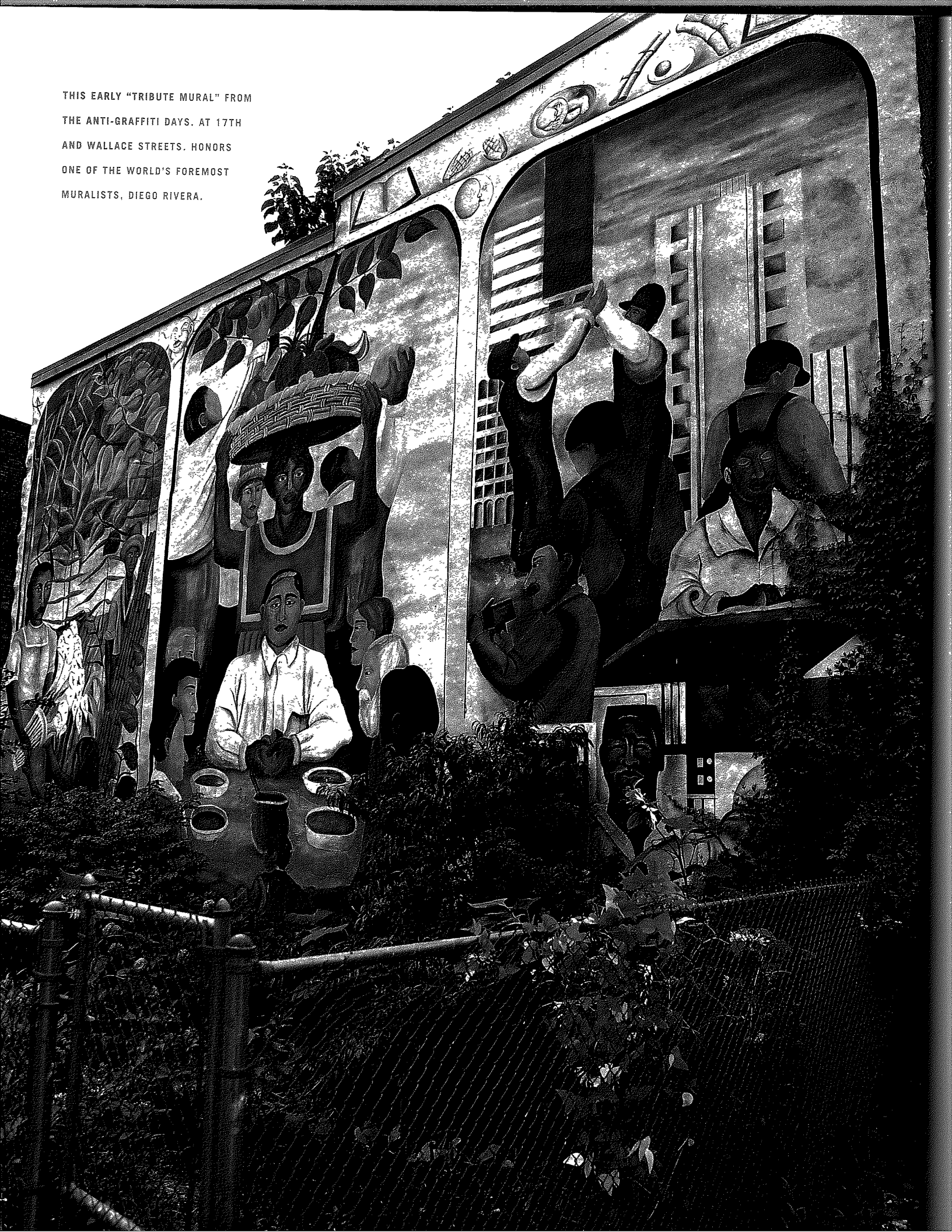
One evening in 1985, as she drove over the Spring Garden Street Bridge, Jane was dismayed to see tags all over the just-completed murals. "I saw 'NOT' and 'PEZ' everywhere in green paint. I was working with graffiti writers, so I figured nobody would write on this bridge, but the mural was just demolished. It was about seven at night, and there was some paint in the back of my Honda. I worked until about ten getting the graffiti off the bridge. I was really aggravated with NOT and PEZ, whoever they were." The next day, Jane learned from former writers on her painting crew that both tags belonged to the same person.

"A few weeks later, I was working on a mural at the corner of 32nd and Powelton. We were all painting when the guys on the crew said, 'Jane, see that guy coming up the street? That's PEZ.' I said, 'No! He's coming up here? I can't believe it.'

"I grabbed a gallon of green paint and hopped off the scaffolding and went up to him and said, 'So, you're PEZ.'

"He said, 'Yeah.'

"I said, 'Great! I'm really glad to meet you. Now I want you to understand the meaning of graffiti—what it feels like to be graffitied.' I went like I was going to throw the green paint on him.



THIS EARLY "TRIBUTE MURAL" FROM THE ANTI-GRAFFITI DAYS, AT 17TH AND WALLACE STREETS, HONORS ONE OF THE WORLD'S FOREMOST MURALISTS, DIEGO RIVERA.

"He said, 'Whoa! Nobody told me you were crazy! I came here to apologize.'

"I put down the paint and said, 'That's really interesting. What do you mean?'

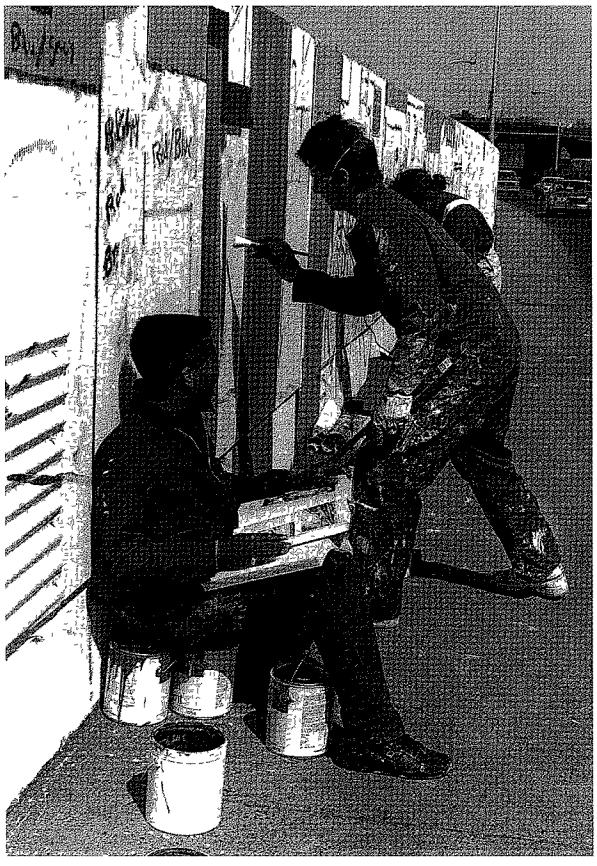
"He said, 'Well, I'm PEZ and my other name is NOT. I started thinking about it, and I realized that I was mad at your boss (Tim Spencer) and I wasn't really mad at you, and it was wrong of me to destroy the bridge.'

"I said, 'Okay. I have an open mind. But I don't think you should get off the hook that easily. If you really want to apologize, I'm going to tell you what to do. You have to volunteer with us. Then, if you put in some time and you do a good job, maybe we can hire you. And,' I said, 'you have to sign The Pledge.'"

PEZ was curious. He asked Jane where she would be painting next. She told him about a mural project that was about to begin in Center City. "If you show up," she told him, "I'll know your apology was sincere."

The mural began without PEZ. Fall became winter before Jane finally heard from him. Despite the cold conditions, this time, he kept his word. "He painted every day for three months, and he was clearly committed. He was climbing all over the scaffolding and lifting and loading and dragging stuff, cleaning the brushes and doing the grunt work that nobody wanted to do," Jane recalled. "As time went on, he did sign The Pledge, and I was able to get him three hours of employment a day. He did really well."

TURNING WALL WRITERS INTO WALL ARTISTS WAS THE MURAL PROGRAM'S EARLY MISSION. TWO OF THE FIRST TAGGERS TO TRADE IN SPRAY PAINT FOR PAINTBRUSHES WERE THEODORE HARRIS (A.K.A., KNIFE) AND ROCCO ALBANO (A.K.A., PEZ), SHOWN HERE WITH JANE PUTTING A FRESH COAT ON THE SPRING GARDEN STREET BRIDGE MURAL.



Eventually, PEZ was given a full-time city job, with benefits. It was not a magic fix. PEZ was a troubled teen with serious drug and alcohol problems. When he was ready to earn his GED, Anti-Graffiti paid for it. Jane introduced PEZ, along with other young participants, to poets, authors, and painters. "The mural program was an anchor in his life against everything else that was going on," Jane recalled. "He was always in a state of turmoil. But he did love mural work, and he was good at it. He liked going door to door, getting signatures from neighbors saying they wanted a mural. He was a good emissary to other writers, too."

"I am large. I contain multitudes."

Theodore A. Harris (a.k.a. KNIFE) met Jane when he dropped by to see a couple of friends who were working on the original Spring Garden Street Bridge mural. At that point, Harris had drifted away from Tim Spencer's original Anti-Graffiti group in Mantua, but he found Jane's knowledge of art irresistible. He had some art books with him, and he and Jane were soon talking. He "buffed" or primed walls, erected

scaffolding and, when the rough work was done, got out the brushes. "These muralists now have got it easy," he half jokes. "They don't want to help with the scaffolding. They don't want to do the priming."

For Harris and other wall writers, the transition from graffiti to city-sponsored murals involved more than working on "permission" walls. If it's graffiti, it's got to be painted with spray paint, and not just any spray paint—it's a point of pride to steal the paint. And yet, in the Anti-Graffiti program, spray paint was banned by mayoral mandate. In fact, Mayor Goode's opposition to spray paint was so strong that the program's logo was a red circle with a diagonal slash across the silhouette of a can of spray paint.

Getting wall writers to change mediums was a hard sell for Jane. "Many of these kids are experts at spray painting, and there is nothing more I can teach them about it," she often said. "I want to build a bridge to other mediums."

"I thought, they've dropped out of school, how do they know about Rothko and Klein and these Abstract Expressionists? I asked one and he said, 'Are you kidding? I've been stealing *Art in America* for years.'"

Although some of the spray can virtuosos wouldn't make the switch, many did—and flourished because of it. Harris, whose politically oriented collages have appeared in several literary publications, is currently working on a book with seminal black writer and activist Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones).

Harris traces much of who he is as an adult to his early experiences with Anti-Graffiti. "I've had so many good experiences painting murals," he said. "I've gotten to work with artists I admire whom I would never have met. I heard Sonia Sanchez read because a friend from the mural program asked me to go. After I heard Sonia, I went right out and got one of her books. I started buying poetry books and started writing poetry and publishing my work. Now, I've been published *with* Sonia."

Harris particularly enjoyed his work on *Boy with Raised Arm* (formerly at 40th Street and Powelton Avenue, 1992, see p. 18). In the original painting by celebrated Philadelphia realist Sidney Goodman, the African American boy in a striped T-shirt is one of several children at play. In the mural, he stands alone against a dark ground, his arm raised in an ambiguous gesture resembling a Black Power salute. Goodman himself worked on the mural, concentrating mostly on the boy's face. Jane, then assistant art director Dietrich Adonis, Harris, and others completed the figure and landscape elements. Young people assigned to Jane by the juvenile court system were put to work filling in flat sections of the background.

Before painting on the Goodman mural could begin, a lower horizontal section of the wall had to be repaired. Then came the question of how to use this extra space. Harris had the idea of adding a line of poetry. Goodman chose the quotation from Walt Whitman that completes the mural: "I am large. I contain multitudes." The words are laid out in white lettering against a black background. Because of its beautifully rendered, poetic subject and

location near a busy intersection, "I am large," as it is often called, was one of the best-known and best-loved murals in the city. In 2002, its building was demolished to make way for new construction. MAP is negotiating to re-create the mural on the new building going up on the site.

DIETRICH ADONIS, FAR LEFT IN THIS PHOTO FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PROGRAM, WITH MEMBERS OF THE MURAL CREW.

A certain kind of magic

Illustrator and art teacher Dietrich Adonis was in his early twenties when he joined the Anti-Graffiti staff in 1985, about six months after Jane. He worked as assistant art director through the early years and later as assistant director. "We had a certain kind of magic in the early years," he reflects. "Tim [Spencer] had a vision; Jane had a vision; and I had a vision. We had different personalities, but it just worked."

Cooperation was central to Anti-Graffiti. In addition to developing designs like *A Tribute to Diego Rivera* (17th and Wallace Streets, restored 1998, see p. 38), Adonis contributed to murals designed by others, helped supervise "graffiti abatement" (cleaning or repainting walls in flat color), evaluated potential mural sites, and met with community leaders and organizations to discuss proposed murals. He also did a lot of the teaching.

In 1989, the program moved from its original headquarters in the City Hall Annex to 1220 Sansom Street. Another location, at 808 N. Broad Street, became the center for its after-school arts workshops until 1996. From 2:30 to 6:30 P.M., the place was jumping with kids who came to make art. They were given art supplies and even transit tokens to get home.

"For some crazy reason it worked," Adonis marvels. "We had guidelines, but we didn't have a curriculum. We just started where the kids (age eleven to eighteen) were and dealt with them on an individual basis. They came and had a boss time."

"People hung out back then," Jane recalled. "Kids would sit around the Anti-Graffiti offices and draw." She was impressed by their self-taught knowledge of art history. "I thought, they've dropped out of school. How do they know about Rothko and Klein and these Abstract Expressionists? I asked one, and he said, 'Are you kidding? I've been stealing *Art in America* for years.'"

Jane's rapport with young writers had some unexpected consequences. One evening, KNIFE, BABY-ROCK, and a couple of other Philly writers with all-too-familiar (if sometimes illegible) tags visited Jane's apartment to look at her art history books. They had a good discussion, but when Jane set out for work the next morning, she was appalled to discover

their show of thanks: The young men had spray painted at least thirty "COOL JANE" tags between her house and her office.

Although the tags testified to Jane's "coolness," they were also a subtle challenge to her mission. She recognized that her response, though diplomatic, must be unequivocal. "When they asked me if I'd seen [the tags], I said, 'I really appreciate the thought, guys, *but*...'" She made it clear that no matter how flattering to her, graffiti would not be tolerated.

Expanded opportunities

The burgeoning arts program expanded rapidly. From one workshop at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it grew to include workshops all over the city. Art shows, auctions, a visiting artist program, and more speakers were added. It even sponsored field trips to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

"A beautiful landscape mural can be a sign that people care and that things can change. So, a three-story waterfall is totally uplifting. It's a political statement."

By the late 1980s, Jane's staff included ten or twelve former graffiti writers. Between 1986 and 1992, her summer programs employed hundreds of kids. In 1986, 1987, and 1988, two thousand kids removed graffiti and painted murals.

"If you were coming into the program," Jane recalled, "it was for more than a six-week arts and crafts class. We offered kids something substantial, a program that was ongoing and would be there for the next few years of their lives. It was a very different concept from what had been done previously in the neighborhoods where I was working. Everywhere I went in those years, kids said, 'Oh, you work for Anti. That's so cool.'"

Social statements

Even though the program could claim solid success in helping many troubled teens like C K, PEZ, and KNIFE, some Philadelphians felt and continue to feel that graffiti writers should be imprisoned rather than educated. "My reply," Jane said, "is, 'We can't even keep murderers in jail. There's got to be another response to nonviolent offenders.'"

"There's often a class difference between people who love graffiti and people who hate it," she observes. "Those who see beauty in graffiti are generally people from the middle class or upper middle class. In impoverished neighborhoods, people see graffiti as a symbol of hopelessness—a manifestation of the forces threatening their survival. They have to worry about their kids getting shot, and the fact that quite literally every exterior surface is covered with graffiti is a reminder that the neighborhood is out of control. A beautiful landscape mural can be a sign that people care and that things can change. So, a three-story waterfall is totally uplifting. It's a political statement."

The walls made other statements as well. Inspired by similar murals in Boston, three murals in different Philadelphia neighborhoods were dedicated to young people who died violently. Portraits of murder victims, often killed in drug-related disputes, have long been

commissioned subjects for gang-related graffiti pieces. In contrast, Parris Stancell's *Stop the Violence* (7th Street and Susquehanna Avenue, 1992) memorializes victims without glorifying gang life and drugs. Stancell painted three pairs of hands of different complexions lifted up to the names of the dead. A few simple flowers ornament the corners of the wall.

"We got the list from Homicide, and then we had to go to the homes of the kids who had been killed to get permission to use the names," Jane explains. "Often [the families] would show us photographs of the kids who were killed. It was very difficult."

Troubled times

Under Wilson Goode, the program's annual budget sometimes exceeded $2 million, an incredible amount of money given the nature of the work. At the dawn of the 1990s, though, Jane and her crew would begin to feel the financial crunch as federal funding was cut and city money became scarce.

Amid Anti-Graffiti's impressive achievements, which included the completion of more than a thousand murals and the instruction of thousands of kids through unprecedented community service, Executive Director Tim Spencer remains an ambiguous figure. Supporters point out that at the age of twenty-six, he had neither the training nor the experience to cope when his small community program ballooned into a citywide operation with a huge budget. They speculate that his management difficulties and erratic behavior were the result of his naiveté and a growing array of health problems that led to frequent hospitalizations over a period of years.

From the beginning, there were serious problems. As early as the summer of 1986, city police descended on the program offices. The city controller, inspector general, and district attorney all launched investigations looking into alleged financial mismanagement. Every full-time employee, including Jane, was questioned about purported abuses involving money, drugs, and sexual harassment. Jane was stunned by the intensity of the investigation. "It was like *Dragnet*," she recalled. In the end, two staffers were arrested for stealing payroll checks. Spencer was never charged with a crime, but for the rest of his life the press linked his name and the program to questionable fiscal practices and other wrongdoings.

In the Anti-Graffiti offices, colleagues called Spencer a "megalomaniac" who verbally abused subordinates. Sometimes he vetoed an artist simply because he took a dislike to the person. Yet even those who felt the director's wrath could not ignore the good work being done under his watch. Ex-graffiti writer Rocco Albano, who had his share of negative run-ins with Spencer, remembers with gratitude an occasion when Spencer "went to bat" for him when he was unfairly arrested. Albano praised Spencer's "vigilance" for persuading SEPTA, the city's public transit system, to keep their walls graffiti free. "Tim was no angel," explained former wall writer Harris, a loyal supporter who knew Spencer well, "but he started something beautiful in this city."

LONGTIME COMMUNITY ACTIVIST AND DRUG FIGHTER *HERMAN WRICE* IS MEMORIALIZED IN THIS HEROIC PORTRAIT BY DAVID MCSHANE, 2000, AT 34TH AND SPRING GARDEN STREETS.

Initially, Spencer welcomed Jane to the program with kindness, but as time passed, he grew increasingly quarrelsome and enigmatic. "Tim was like a character out of a Shakespearean play," Jane recalled. "There was almost a sense of greatness about him. His early work in Mantua was compassionate and effective. It received well-deserved recognition. He came into all this money and power at a young age, and then he couldn't handle it. The management of Anti-Graffiti reflected his internal conflicts. At the core was a wonderful vision, but its daily implementation was unstable."

From its inception, the Anti-Graffiti Network was something of an anomaly within Philadelphia's city government. It was not an official department, but it had its own operating budget. This arrangement gave Spencer unusual latitude in spending, with virtually no accountability. "Money never seemed to be a problem," Jane recalled of the early years when federal, state, and city funding was plentiful.

During his 1991 campaign for mayor, Ed Rendell promised to shut down the troubled Anti-Graffiti Network if elected. Nevertheless, he spared the program and even declared January 5, 1993, "Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network Day." The certificate presented on

that occasion praises the program for removing graffiti from 3,200 locations, painting fifty murals, and counseling two hundred youths. All this was accomplished in one year, 1992, and all in spite of a 71 percent reduction in funding, from $1.5 million to $430,000.

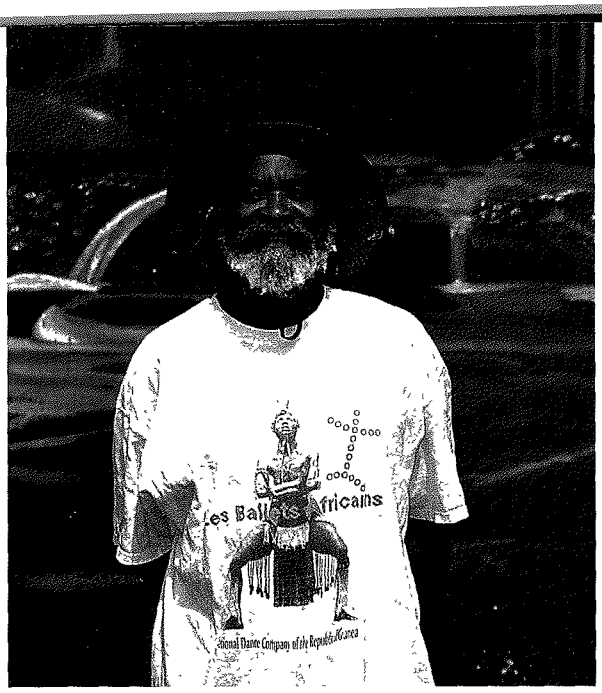
In the early 1990s, as the city nearly slipped into bankruptcy, no one was spared. Harsh budget cuts were exacerbated by the loss of federal and state funding for education and arts programs. Anti-Graffiti's summer program was cut to one hundred kids, and after-school activities were totally eliminated. Jane managed to pull together a few additional workshops, but she struggled with fewer jobs for kids and a reduced staff.

Spencer, at this time, was facing increasing criticism on several fronts. In 1995, the Philadelphia *City Paper* wrote an investigative story about the program that included allegations of sexual harassment against Spencer. At the time of his death on April 21, 1996, he was reportedly under investigation by the city's Commission on Human Relations. A well-informed outside observer said simply, "Tim was killing the program and he was dying himself."

During this difficult period, both Jane and Dietrich Adonis were so demoralized that they made plans to leave. Jane even applied to Temple Law School but ultimately decided to stick it out at Anti-Graffiti a little longer.

Following Spencer's death at the age of thirty-seven, there was a dramatic public display of grief. In spite of his failings—whatever they may have been—Spencer had forged meaningful bonds with many people in the city. His funeral at the Metropolitan Baptist Church overflowed with hundreds of mourners. He was eulogized by two mayors and other prominent Philadelphia politicians.

Although she might have felt relief to be free of such a difficult and controversial boss, Jane recalled feeling "a deep sense of loss. Tim and I were partners for years." She mused, "I really grew up at Anti-Graffiti. I learned about community transformation and working with people there. Tim gave me an entree into the black community that I could never have had otherwise. In spite of our many conflicts, he gave me the opportunity to develop the mural program and to work with so many young people. For that I'll always be grateful."



RAS MALIK

"As my Yoga teacher says, 'When the student is ready, the master will appear.' I've found that in life," contends muralist Ras Malik. Although he envisioned himself as an artist from childhood, he says, "I put in a lot of time and made a great sacrifice to paint murals like I do. It's a type of devotion."

Malik had only eight years of education in a one-room North Carolina schoolhouse before he had to drop out to work full time in the tobacco fields with his mother and four siblings. His father died when he was seven. "Sharecropping is a very meager type of living," he explains. "You have to share half [of] whatever you raise on white man's land with the land owner. You have to borrow to get stuff to eat and then pay your debt. I saw this as a dead end situation from an early age." When he was eighteen, Malik came to Philadelphia at the invitation of a childhood friend. He worked various jobs, finished high school, and started a commercial art course before he was drafted in 1957. While he was serving as a medic in the Army, his art talent was discovered and he was drafted again—into making signs and later doing anatomical illustration at a medical facility. This gave him an opportunity to study the human skeleton and muscular system.

Upon his discharge, his impressive portfolio and the GI Bill enabled him to study illustration at the Philadelphia College of Art (PCA), now the University of the Arts.

Almost simultaneously, Malik began work as a corrections officer at Holmesburg Detention Center House of Corrections, where he remained from 1961 to 1974. "It was an extremely hard place to work. I can still smell it—the most horrendous odor in the jails. I can still hear that profanity."

One day, during Malik's senior year at PCA, the warden saw him drawing and said, "Oh, you're a very good artist. Why not teach some art classes?" Some of the men were very receptive. "It was a good way to get them to open up their minds to creativity. It was a good rehabilitative tool." Later, he formed the Bastille Art League with some of his former students who were no longer incarcerated. The League served as a support group for artists and writers. At least one former member now paints murals with the Mural Arts Program. Malik has worked as a book illustrator and had his own sign-painting business for some fifteen years. He has also done a lot of teaching. In the late 1980s, he showed Jane his portfolio. She immediately hired him to teach in the Anti-Graffiti workshop at 808 North Broad Street.

In 1994, William Freeman offered Malik his first crack at murals. Freeman needed help painting a series of sports figures on the columns beneath a PennDOT overpass at Ridge Avenue and Ferry Road, just off Kelly Drive in the East Falls section of the city. "It was a very good experience. We inspired each other," Malik remembers. The paintings were seen by large numbers of commuters and aroused positive comment.

Following the program's reorganization in 1996, Malik began to receive solo commissions. After painting his second mural, the landscape *Forest Green* (Emerald and Dauphin Streets) in mostly Puerto Rican Norris Square, the dreadlocked African American decided to move to the welcoming neighborhood despite his rudimentary Spanish. He joined the board of the Norris Square Civic Association and began teaching art to neighborhood children after school. He has since painted several more local murals there, including *Recuerdos de Nuestra Tierra Encantada* (Memories of our Enchanting Land, 2200 block of North Howard Street, between Susquehanna Avenue and Dauphin Street), picturing a rural Puerto Rican landscape with a field of brilliant tulips and a flaming Royal Poinciana, or *flamboya,* tree.

Malik believes *Compassion* (55th and Regent Streets, 1997, see next page) was his third individual effort. At the time, the West Philadelphia neighborhood was overrun with drug dealers and seriously demoralized. "Everybody wanted what they called a 'spiritual type of mural'—something that would unite the people," he recalls. His first idea was rejected. Then Phyllis Walker, a well-known community leader, came across a calendar picture of hands over a table with plenty of food and suggested using this idea for the mural. Malik agreed, but then the image prompted other possibilities. "I got to thinking: The hands were the essential thing. Once I began to visualize hands in the sky, something just clicked in my head." In his next sketch, divine hands reach down from the sky, pouring blessings onto a block of row houses that almost mirror the real houses across from the mural. He submitted it to the group, and they were pleased.

In addition to depicting neighborhood houses, the artist says, "I was looking at people and putting them into the picture as I went along. I do that a lot of times."

***COMPASSION*, 55TH AND REGENT STREETS.**

Although Malik did not ask anyone to pose, he closely observed residents, including a "lady who was always ready to offer me some milk or cookies or something. She had a very open personality and was respected by everyone else in the neighborhood."

"As the mural progressed, the people showed me how they really appreciated it. The wall was on an old dilapidated lot with paper and junk strewn around, but they began to transform the lot into a nice garden area with flowers and everything. It's a great feeling to do something that can change a neighborhood."

THE PEACE WALL

PRECEDING PAGES RISING ABOVE THE STREET AND ITS TUMULTUOUS ORIGINS, *THE PEACE WALL*, 29TH AND WHARTON STREETS, STANDS AS ONE OF PHILADELPHIA'S MOST ENDURING ICONS OF HOPE.

One day in the summer of 1997, Jane Golden and Lillian Ray went knocking on doors. They were an unusual pair in the racially charged South Philadelphia neighborhood called Grays Ferry: Ray, an African American community activist who had lived all of her life in the area, and Jane, a white outsider who ran the citywide mural program. The women shared an artistic vision. They wanted to help divided residents find common ground through a mural.

Jane and Ray knew it would be a tough sell in the long-troubled cauldron that is Grays Ferry. The neighborhood had crime, abandoned buildings, isolation, and poverty to deal with, and earlier that year it had been rocked by a wave of racial unrest that caught the nation's attention. The wounds were still fresh and showed no signs of healing anytime soon. After holding a series of community meetings with sparse or no attendance, Jane and Ray hit the streets to pitch the mural and search for models. They stopped children on the sidewalk, asking them to fetch their parents. Over and over, the pair pleaded: Come to the church to be photographed. "Would you come down," Jane urged, "and literally lend us your hand?"

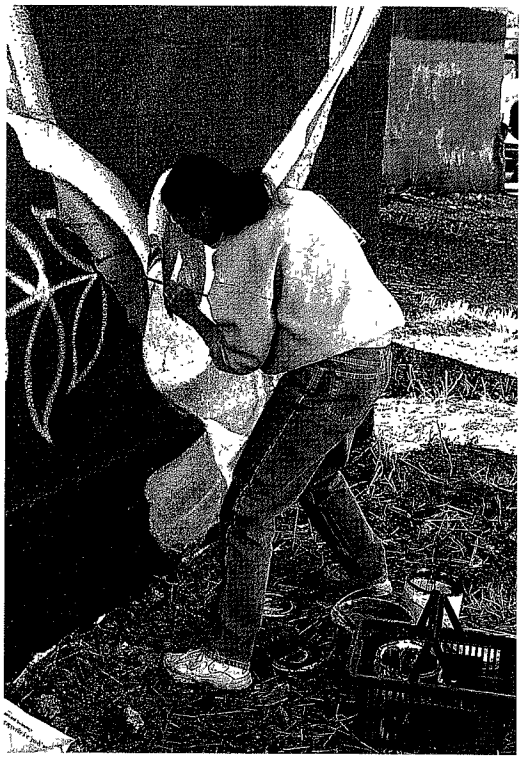
After about an hour, the duo returned to the Lighthouse Christian Church at 30th and Wharton Streets. For the first time in a decade of working in Philadelphia, the always-optimistic Jane had serious doubts about one of her mural projects. Some white residents had slammed the door in her face. Black residents who listened to the pitch still couldn't be moved to participate. Struggling with her emotions, Jane hardly noticed that the church had started filling up with people. Residents filed in, unsure exactly why they had come but believing somehow the message made sense. More than twenty volunteers arrived. Jane's husband, Anthony Heriza, assembled them in a circle. He climbed on a ladder and began snapping pictures of all the extended hands piling on top of each other, like a multicultural basketball team joining in a pregame huddle. "Everyone was reaching for each other. It wasn't a cure for racism, but it was important," Jane recalled. "I felt stirrings, that's what I felt."

A SECOND *PEACE WALL*, PAINTED BY NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS AT FINNEGAN'S RECREATION CENTER, 29TH AND WHARTON STREETS.

A fractured community

Kevin Spicer grew up in Grays Ferry and remembers how the mood there changed during the 1960s. Many white families moved away, fleeing the neighborhood and the city. Those who couldn't leave grew more frustrated by their surroundings. Philadelphia's manufacturing industry had collapsed, saddling residents with economic and personal hardships. Then, rioting rocked the city in the early 1970s, leaving a wake of racial tension and fear. In Grays Ferry, Spicer recalled, some blocks were safe for African Americans to travel, while venturing onto others almost guaranteed a fight. "You learned quickly around here where you belonged, and where you didn't."

Lillian Ray had spent all of her nearly seven decades on earth in Grays Ferry. In 1988, she started a basketball league at nearby Finnegan Playground with twelve teams—eleven black and one white. The white team lost to a black team in the playoffs. The next day, Ray found all of the basketball nets cut down.



JANE ADDS A DOVE AS A FINISHING TOUCH TO *THE PEACE WALL.*

Jim Helman arrived in 1995 from Baltimore. As a white retiree moving into a largely black section of the neighborhood, Helman said he was soon exposed to what he calls "intolerant, hateful" messages coming from other whites toward their African American neighbors. Making matters worse were the two dueling community groups claiming to speak for the neighborhood. One was all white, the other nearly all black. The only thing the organizations had in common was mutual animosity.

The neighborhood friction was at its worst, symbolized by an ugly annual tradition. Each summer, vandals threw bottles into the outdoor public pool at Vare Recreation Center in an attempt to keep African Americans who lived in the nearby public housing project from using the pool, which was located in a predominantly white part of Grays Ferry. By trashing the pool at night, the vandals were able to shatter enough glass to keep the pool closed the next day.

Despite this history, people in Grays Ferry coexisted in relative peace throughout most of the 1990s. All that changed one night in February 1997, when a group of white men left a beef-and-beer party at St. Gabriel's Roman Catholic Church. Outside, the white men got into a fight with two black men, the son and nephew of a woman named Annette Williams. During the melee, the white men smashed the front windows and door of Williams's home, punching her and using racial slurs. Then, three weeks later, two black men were arrested and charged in the shooting death of a white teenager during a robbery at a Grays Ferry pharmacy.

The brawl and the shooting put Grays Ferry in an uncomfortable national spotlight. Suddenly, the neighborhood was being held up as an example of the troubled state of race relations for all of America. Calls for thousands of African Americans to stage a protest march through the neighborhood had Lillian Ray worried: "All I could see was a chaotic situation, where if things got out of hand, the only thing that would be represented was hate."

The day before the march was to take place, Ray reached out to all of the smaller community groups in the area asking for a meeting at nearby Finnegan Playground. Eight of the ten organizations came, their members agreeing to form a new group called "Grays Ferry United." Their mission: to bring the neighborhood back together, to forge peace between whites and blacks.

The march took place without incident. So did an antiracism rally, which drew hundreds of people, including then-mayor Ed Rendell and controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. Once the network television crews went home, Rendell set about finding long-lasting solutions to the problems in Grays Ferry. He assigned then-recreation commissioner Michael DiBerardinis—a tough-talking former community organizer who had street credibility with activists of many races—to be the point man in the neighborhood.

The city's recreation department invested $200,000 in murals and renovations at recreation centers in the heart of the troubled community, hoping to give young people something more constructive to do with their time than fight. Private foundations chipped in $100,000 to help a new, integrated community development corporation get off the ground. Other organizations financed summer job programs for area youths.

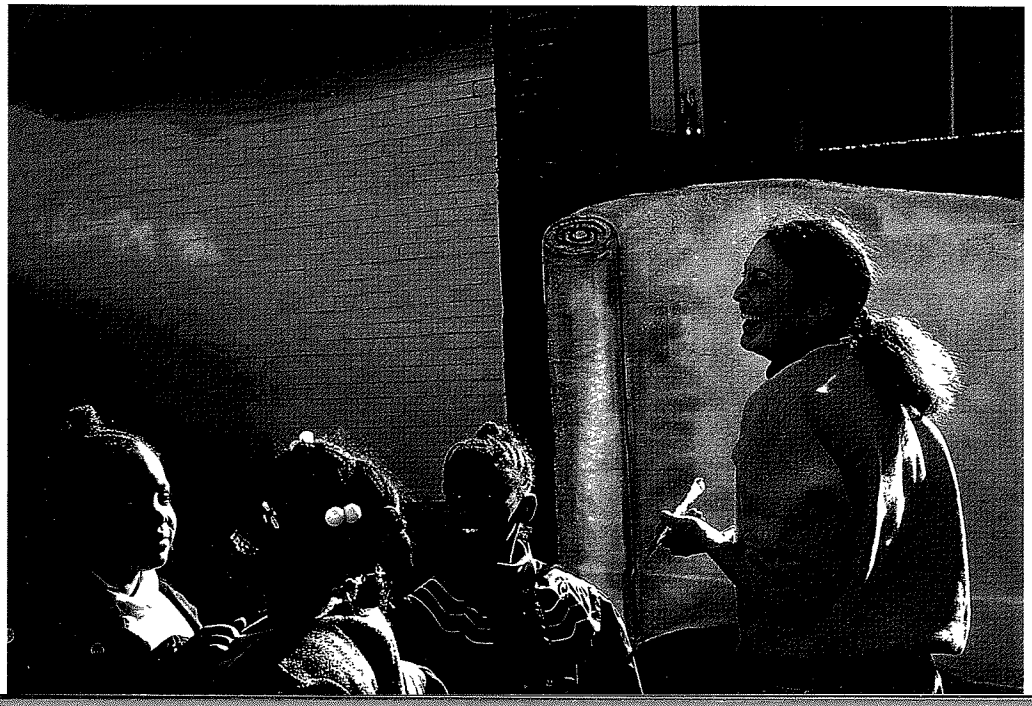
While the groundwork was being laid, Jane was at work, as usual, hunting for walls that would make good mural canvases. She had a $32,000 grant from the William Penn Foundation to do three murals celebrating Quaker history and philosophy, themes that are close to Philadelphians' hearts. The first was *Immigration and the Dignity of Labor* (8th Street and Fairmount Avenue), completed by David McShane in 1996. Then came *The Underground Railroad* (2902 Germantown Avenue) by Cavin Jones. Next up was *The Peace Wall,* honoring the pacifism that defines the Quaker faith. Originally, Jane intended to paint the mural at 13th and Market Streets in the heart of Center City. Halfway through the design process, the wall's owners backed out. Then it hit her: Grays Ferry. Given the divisions and distrust between the residents there, she said, "It seemed to me like an obvious place to do a peace wall."

From the beginning, there were skeptics. Some in the neighborhood thought the mural idea was ridiculous, even hypocritical.

What neighborhood are they talking about?

Jane called Lillian Ray after reading about her new unified Grays Ferry organization in the newspaper. The women realized they shared a vision for making the community stronger, and both were keenly aware that there could be no progress unless black and white residents chose to work together. Jane and Ray met and began hatching their plans.

From the beginning, there were skeptics. Some in the neighborhood thought the mural idea was ridiculous, even hypocritical. Others accused City Hall of imposing its will on the community. Kevin Spicer, the lifelong resident, called it a "waste of time," a "spoon-fed" response designed to force unity whether or not the residents really wanted it.



JANE TAKES A BREAK FROM WORKING TO SPEAK WITH NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS.

Charles Reeves was livid that his organization, the Committee of Concerned Citizens, wasn't involved in the process. Then again, he really didn't want to be a part of it. During the uproar over the Annette Williams incident, Reeves emerged as Grays Ferry's loudest malcontent, an African American filled with years of stifled rage who was unafraid to shout about it each night on the local television news. Reeves was among those who equated murals with deterioration and demise. He did not think Grays Ferry needed any more reminders of its problems—especially not some painting implying a warm, fuzzy togetherness that just didn't exist. "I thought it was a joke," Reeves recalled. "I wondered, 'What neighborhood are they talking about?'"

Lillian Ray and the members of the new Grays Ferry United would not be deterred. They wanted a mural, a painting with a spiritual theme whose message would represent the many racial and ethnic groups in the neighborhood. They met with residents to toss around

ideas. One woman wanted a dove carrying an olive branch in its mouth. Another favored a more religious mural with Jesus surrounded by a group of multiracial children. An older man advocated for a mural featuring adults showing children right from wrong. Ray nodded, and then she suggested a mix of young and old hands. Jane waited for a moment to gauge the group's response. When she saw approval, she smiled and said she could already visualize painting a mural full of hands. "That could really be dramatic."

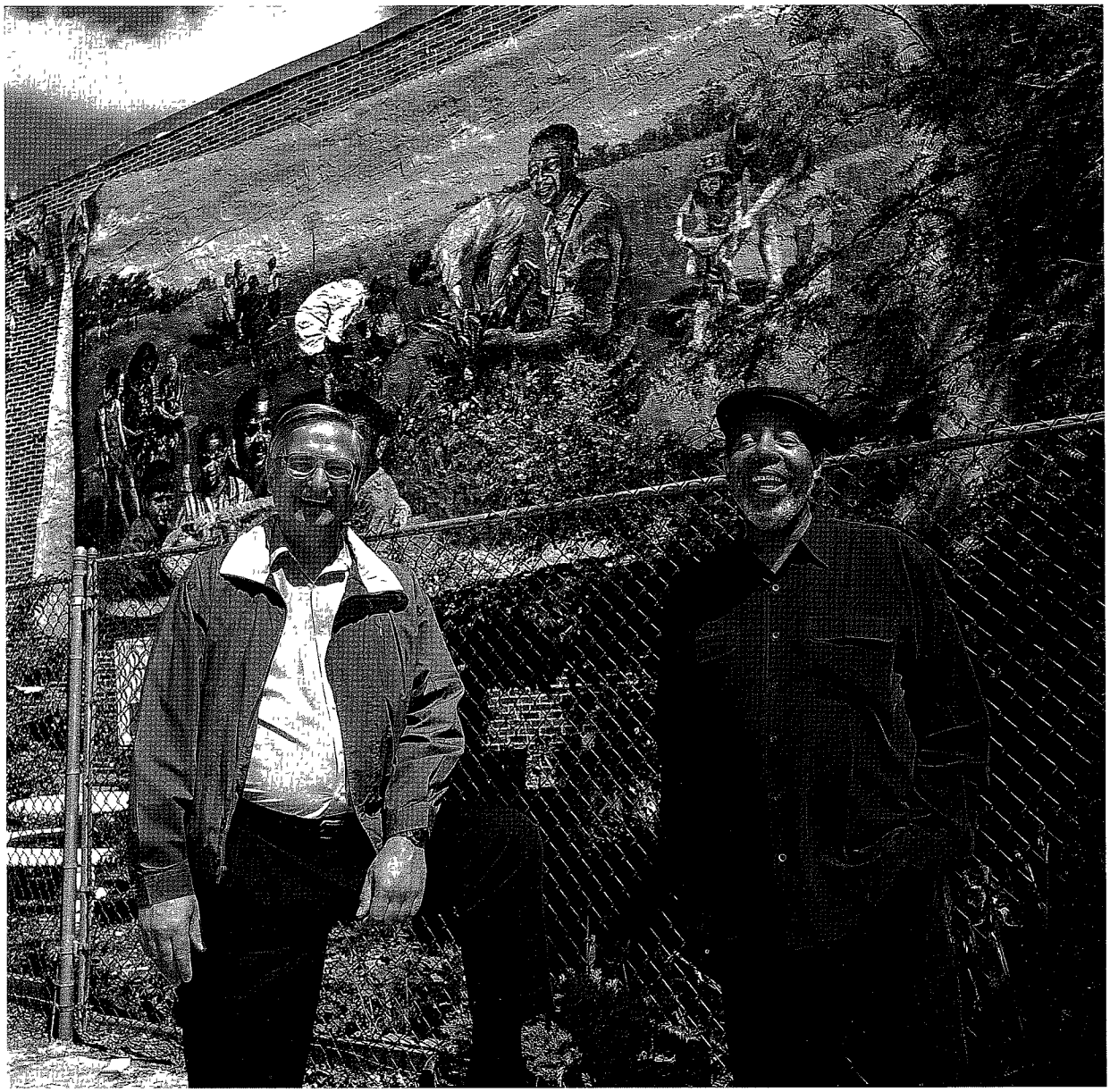
Two weeks later, the group reconvened. Jane brought several sketches, imploring the residents to think carefully about the choices because the design is "where the mural is born." She did her best to guide them without imposing her views. "I see murals as a sort of autobiography of the city," she often tells community groups. "Murals provide people with a voice. It's their statement, their history, their future." This time, her sales pitch for lengthy contemplation fell flat because the sketch of the interlocking hands was the clear

PAINTED NOT LONG AFTER *THE PEACE WALL*, JOSH SARANTITIS'S 1998 *COMMON GROUND*, AT 30TH AND DICKINSON STREETS. OFFERS ITS MESSAGE OF RESPECT AND UNITY IN DIVERSITY ON BEHALF OF THE CHILDREN OF GRAYS FERRY.

favorite. Something about seeing the dark and light hands touching one another resonated with the room of people who had endured struggles over skin color all their lives. "We were the peacemakers," Ray explained. "We wanted to bring a calmness, to prove all races can love each other."

Jane explained that to make the mural lifelike, she planned to photograph the hands of neighborhood residents. That image would be transferred to a digital slide. Then, the slide would be projected onto a wall, twenty-two feet high by forty feet wide, like a movie, with artists sketching the outlines and details of each hand. The projection process took three long October nights. Each night, both black and white neighbors came out of their homes to watch the work at the wall at 29th and Wharton Streets, across from the city-owned Finnegan Playground. The residents offered cookies, tea, and encouragement.

GRAYS FERRY RESIDENTS JIM HELMAN (LEFT) AND CHARLES REEVES, EARLY SKEPTICS OF *THE PEACE WALL*, ARE NOW PROUD TO HAVE MURALS LIKE IT AND *GUARDIAN ANGELS*, 32ND AND REED STREETS, IN THEIR COMMUNITY.



Up on the scaffolding, Jane and Dietrich Adonis, the mural program's assistant artistic director, worked in tandem in their own exhibit of racial harmony. Though he's black and she's white, after a decade of painting the city together, they would always tell people they didn't see each other in any color.

Once the image was projected onto the wall, Jane and Adonis traced the design—the broad outline of eleven hands, plus every crease and wrinkle in each finger, thumb, and nail. Although the rough sketch looked like a confusing mess of dots and squiggles, it would later help the muralists more accurately depict the tones and colors of the actual hands. Peter Pagast, a muralist known for his precise photorealist style, was brought in to fully capture the human elements of the hands.

Jane, Adonis, and Pagast spent six weeks painting the mural. Neighborhood children, black and white, participated in "peace workshops" and painted minimurals at three Grays Ferry recreation centers. Each day, a police cruiser idled nearby, protecting the artists and their space. One resident, a white man, came by the site several times complaining and suggesting that the mural would be vandalized as soon as it was finished. Surprisingly, Jane found herself nodding in agreement. Of the 1,500 murals in the city at that time, she figured none was as likely to be a target of vandals as this one.

The mural was completed just before Christmas 1997 and dedicated a month later. From a distance, the finished product looks like a giant photograph. Eleven hands—five black, six white—fill the width of the wall: The wrinkled and worn hand of a grandfather touching the smooth skin of a child; the hands of a black mother reaching out to a white mother; a woman wearing two rings; a child with pudgy knuckles; a man's wrist covered with a starched white shirt and gray suit jacket; a black hand with bright red nail polish on neatly manicured nails. To the right of the mural is a low wall with a white dove painted on a black background and the biblical message, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

"The mural was a symbol of the love that was here in Grays Ferry, as opposed to the hate."

At the dedication, residents and city officials held hands and sang songs. Ray was among a mixed-race crowd feeling the emotions jump off the wall. Years later, she still feels it: "The mural was a symbol of the love that was here in Grays Ferry, as opposed to the hate," Ray says. "It's utopia."

Small steps to progress

In the summer of 1998, a year after the incident at Annette Williams's house, vandals again attempted to keep the Vare Recreation Center pool closed by littering it with glass. This time, they were met with resistance. Michael DiBerardinis stationed police officers at the pool during the day and paid guards to sit outside all night. At the end of each day, the pool was drained. That way, even if bottles were thrown in the dark, the empty pool could be swept clean of glass in the morning and refilled before the children arrived. Given the

water and labor costs, it was an expensive solution. But it worked. For the first time in memory, the pool stayed open all summer for all neighborhood residents to use.

After *The Peace Wall,* Jane and Ray felt that Grays Ferry residents were ready to experience more murals. In 1999, the Vare Recreation Center was chosen to be part of a new Mural Arts Program educational effort known as the "Big Picture." This multiyear program teaches children mural history and technique and gives them experience painting murals with professional artists in the neighborhood. "It just seemed like the natural thing to do to continue our work in the community," Jane said. "If people didn't buy into the mural, maybe they would buy into the Big Picture program. It's hard to say 'No' to art education for kids."

At the first meeting to discuss the new venture, Jane was surprised by one name on the sign-in list: Charles Reeves, the African American activist who was a longtime mural foe and fairly regular opponent of City Hall initiatives. "I had so feared him," Jane recalled. "I couldn't believe he would come and be supportive."

For the new venture to work, Jane insisted that it serve a mix of white and black students. This was not easy. Mural program staffers had to be vigilant about calling parents and making sure children felt safe and welcome. Unfortunately, as black children began attending in greater numbers, white children started dropping out of the program.

The multiyear program teaches children mural history and technique and gives them experience working with professional artists on painting murals in the neighborhood.

Although Kevin Spicer was not a big fan of *The Peace Wall,* he agreed to let the Mural Arts Program paint the side of his house—in part out of a belief that more murals would benefit the area, in part because he wanted the wall repaired and restored. Even with Spicer on board, Jane knew that some residents in the territory-conscious neighborhood would not be happy with the location. Spicer lived at 32nd and Reed Streets in the far western border of the neighborhood, near Stinger Square Park, a van's ride away from the Vare Recreation Center where most of the children were studying.

Finding a wall was just the first step. Reaching consensus on a theme in the still-splintered neighborhood proved equally difficult. Some wanted a person reading. Others wanted people singing and playing instruments. Some residents wanted to memorialize people from the community who were dead, while others wanted to honor Grays Ferry's living heroes. Jane dared to speak out at one community meeting in an effort to get people to meet in the middle. It did not go well. "We had this little tussle. I could tell they were angry with me. I said, 'Let's pare it down. You're going to have visual cacophony. It's going to be just a mess,'" she recalled. "I said, 'You've got to just work with me here. We're the experts. We can do this. It's a leap of faith. You've got to trust us.'" The group finally agreed, settling on a theme honoring William "Whip" Griffin, a deceased community leader who had been a father figure to many in the neighborhood.

THIS *HISTORY OF GRAYS FERRY*, 2001, BY JOSH SARANTITIS, AT 34TH AND WHARTON STREETS, IS TOLD ON TWO WALLS, CAPTURING BOTH THE COMMUNITY'S PAST AND ITS FUTURE. A SCULPTURE GARDEN IS PLANNED FOR THE AREA IN FRONT OF THE MURAL.

In the summer of 2000, *Guardian Angels* (32nd and Reed Streets, see p. 56) emerged from the hands of two young muralists, Jason Slowik and Eric Okdeh, seniors at Tyler School of Art working on their first major project. In a small space, they captured several images from life in the neighborhood: A father helping his child learn to ride a bicycle; a woman reading to two children; a man assisting three youngsters on an art project; another man coaching a group on the basketball court. At the center of it all is Griffin, watching over his neighbors as they tend a community garden. The mural itself is painted to resemble a work on cloth, being held up on the wall by two cherubs. Facing *Guardian Angels* is another small mural across the street, this one the handiwork of children from the Big Picture program. That mural proclaims in a rainbow of colors that "peace is power."

Unlike *The Peace Wall*, *Guardian Angels* was positively received from the moment the scaffolding was removed. "This mural is ours. We planned it," explains Jim Helman. He is now such a fan that he testified on the Mural Art Program's behalf before Philadelphia City Council, urging politicians to continue the program and increase Jane's funding. Kevin Spicer smiles

EXTENDING BEYOND THE ROOF OF THE BUILDING AND INCORPORATING INSPIRATIONAL TEXT, *DREAM IN FLIGHT* BY JOSH SARANTITIS, 2000, AT 1453 POINT BREEZE AVENUE ENCOURAGES US TO ASPIRE BEYOND OUR LIMITS.

when he talks about *Guardian Angels,* saying the mural on the side of his home instills "self-pride" in the neighborhood. Charles Reeves, once one of the program's harshest critics, now says murals "light up the community."

Lillian Ray marvels how, despite the continued economic decline of the neighborhood, *The Peace Wall* has never been attacked with graffiti or vandalized. She wants to add lighting to illuminate the mural and work with residents to create a garden with benches to make the space welcoming for reflection.

In the summer of 2001, the neighborhood got its first "landmark mural," a colossal piece of art painted by Josh Sarantitis on two adjoining walls at the corner of 34th and Wharton Streets (see p. 59). The mural, called *The History of Grays Ferry,* has two parts contrasting the neighborhood's colonial past and industrial present: One wall celebrates the first bridge to cross the Schuylkill River into Grays Ferry in the neighborhood's early days; the other depicts a girl looking back into the past, in front of an image of the modern bridge that leads into the community. The location is key, given that thousands of drivers whizzing by on the busy Schuylkill Expressway see the mural each day.

Just a few blocks away, artist Cliff Eubanks painted *Morning Landscape* (28th Street, near Wharton), the third new mural in Grays Ferry in 2001. (Fourth, if you count the small antiviolence, antidrug mural at 27th and Dickinson Streets painted by children in the Big Picture program.)

Now, even some of *The Peace Wall*'s harshest critics have found themselves changing their minds about the mural that got it all started. The most skeptical, hardened Grays Ferry residents acknowledge that the mural's positive message has done more for the community than silence. "I like it now," admits Charles Reeves. "I'm hoping we will someday be at that point" where black and white really do come together.

Jim Helman, Reeves's white counterpart, testified before Philadelphia's City Council in early 2001: "Having been tested by time, Grays Ferry residents tend to be opinionated, outspoken, and stubborn. There are those who scoff at *The Peace Wall,* saying it is simplistic or idealistic. But, a growing number of residents glance at *The Peace Wall* whenever they pass it and think of the possibilities. They think of what Grays Ferry can be, what Grays Ferry should be." He told the roomful of elected officials: "*The Peace Wall* is a vivid display that the strength of our community is in the diversity of our residents, residents of every faith and belief, of every economic level, and of every ethnic origin. *The Peace Wall* is a great example of the powerful statement that can be made through mural art, even in a troubled community."

"*The Peace Wall* is a vivid display that the strength of our community is in the diversity of our residents, residents of every faith and belief, of every economic level, and of every ethnic origin."