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New Liberty Station murals all about improvisation



Tijuana artist Hugo Crosthwaite paints live in front of guests at the Installations at the Station art event at Liberty Station in San Diego on Sunday. Crosthwaite's live paintings will run through August 17th. (Photo by K.C. Alfred/San Diego Union-Tribune) (K.C. Alfred / San Diego Union-Tribune)



By **David Garrick**

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People visiting Liberty Station to shop and eat on Sunday got the rare chance to see a professional painter improvising art based on feedback from the crowd and the area's energetic bustle.

Tijuana artist Hugo Crosthwaite is in the process of painting at least eight large murals on the outdoor walls of Liberty Station's Barracks 14, but Crosthwaite has no preliminary sketches — or any plan at all really.

"Usually when an artist comes to a public space they have everything sketched out and they just do the piece and then it's unveiled," he said in the shaded walkway where he's already completed two of the murals. "In this case, I'm coming every day for 16 days and improvising in public so people can see the process as it's created."

Among his goals are making people think, exposing people to the process of art making and convincing people they could be an artist by demystifying that process.

"I've gotten very positive feedback," Crosthwaite said. "Especially from children — a little girl saw one of the faces and said 'it's just little lines.' Once you see someone do it, you say 'Oh, I can do this too.'"

Crosthwaite, 46, began his effort on Friday and is scheduled to continue painting and improvising every day through Aug. 17 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Part of Liberty Station's "Art in Public Places" program, Crosthwaite's murals are also a chance to expose people to professional art.

Sandra Martins, who asked Crosthwaite several questions about his murals on Sunday afternoon, said she thinks the program is a brilliant idea.

"I think it's awesome for us to have this kind of art in a place like this," she said. "It's rare that you see a real artist coming to show his work or her work in a shopping area filled with people who don't go to museums to see art."

Crosthwaite agreed.

"People are sometimes hesitant to go to art museums or art galleries — they think of art as boring," he said. "So bringing art to a public place is emphasizing visual literacy, which has been lost for a lot of people because we spend too much time watching TV or on the internet."

The murals painted so far are dominated by large faces with enigmatic expressions, which has prompted the kind of speculation that Crosthwaite likes to see.

"People have been asking 'why is she sad' or 'what is she thinking' —so the answers aren't just given to you, you have to come up with your own narrative," he said. "It's like the difference between reading and TV."

Lin Culler, who also asked Crosthwaite some questions, said she thinks watching him paint the murals is making people realize art is not something out of reach.

"It shows people how accessible art is and maybe gets rid of pre-conceived ideas that there's only one way or only one medium that some people like," Culler said.

Culler said she was disappointed to learn that the murals will only be part of Liberty Station's visual landscape for a few months after Crosthwaite completes them, and then get painted over.

"Usually when you think about mural work, you think about something that's going to be there forever," Crosthwaite said. "The moment a musician stops playing an instrument, the performance stops. The reality is everything is impermanent — everything ends. You see me here painting it, but it's going to disappear."

Crosthwaite's murals are the third in a series of six public art projects scheduled during Liberty Station's "Installations at the Station" series.

The next three are "Sky Mosaic" by David Krimmel, "Rolling it Forward" by Jeremy Nuttall and "Twinline" by Karl Alex Roesch.

The series is coordinated by the NTC Foundation, which oversees the development and operation of 26 buildings in Liberty Station's Arts District.

NTC stands for Naval Training Center, the name of Liberty Station before it was transformed from a military base into an upscale shopping and dining district on the edge of Point Loma.

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