

Artist's outside painting eventually going indoors

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Bill Porteous doesn't usually have a downtown intersection for a studio and plywood for his canvas, but as long as he has his paints with him, he's in his element.

The prominent Victoria abstract artist has taken on a unique private commission -- and by far his longest -- with the task of creating a painting on the wall that borders the high-profile Atrium construction site bound by Blanshard, Yates and Johnson streets. He is less than a week into a job that he estimates could take as long as 46 days.

"The idea is, rather than just putting up a construction fence, which they have to do anyway, we decided to make an artwork out of it," Porteous said, as he applied acrylic paint to the specially coated black surface of a plywood panel.

He said the finished product, named Prelude, will extend all the way around the site.

"It's roughly 500 feet."

That's 152 metres, or roughly 11/2 football fields.

"I have to remember it's like climbing a mountain, one foot at a time," Porteous said.

After it's finished, the painting will be covered with Varathane for protection. And once the building itself is nearing completion, the painting will be transferred in various lengths to a permanent place on inside walls.

"They're finding places already within the building structure to put it," Porteous said.

He said that he and Frank D'Ambrosio, the building's architect with whom he has worked in the past, came up with the concept together.

"He and I decided it would be cool to do an artwork that we could re-install in the building later."

Porteous has produced other notable public art in the past, including a 7.3-by-4-metre piece at the Gate House Building, another Jawl venture at the Selkirk Waterfront.

He is also known as one of the founding members of the Victoria College of

9/23/2008

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Art, and for having taught fine arts at both the University of Victoria and Camosun College.

Porteous began working on his painting last Saturday, which also happened to be the day he appeared at a gala event at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria as one of 10 representatives of contemporary art on Vancouver Island.

The gallery event included an auction of the artists' work conducted by Christie's Canada, with a portion of the money going to the gallery.

"It was a very interesting day, starting from working on an outside wall of a building," Porteous said. He added that he loves having the chance to create in an outdoor setting. "To me, it's an opportunity to explore and have fun with the paint."

Just about everybody who has commented as they pass by has been positive, he said.

"But there was one guy walking by and he was ranting that he hoped it wasn't being paid for with taxpayer money."

A key aspect of the piece will be the "interference pigment" in the paint he is using, Porteous said.

It makes the colours shift and change depending on the angle at which they are seen, and can give them a metallic look.

"It's meant to provide an ambient, kind of playful, shifting colour pattern in relation to the black [background]. Even though it's a symmetrical pattern, repeated, there's a randomness, as well -- which is kind of like the urban-built environment."

"Hopefully people will enjoy it. Hopefully it enriches the visual landscape."

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