



NEWS LOCAL

Alex Bierk chosen to create Peterborough Downtown Business Improvement Area's first mural at Simcoe and Queen streets



By Joelle Kovach
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Jury chairwoman Wendy Trussler and city public art co-ordinator with chairman Dennis Carter-Edward of art, culture and heritage advisory committee in front of a mock-up by local artist Alex Bierk showing the mural on Simcoe and Queen streets on Tuesday July 5, 2016 at City Hall in Peterborough, Ont. Clifford Skarstedt/Peterborough Examiner/Postmedia Network

Local artist Alex Bierk has been chosen to create a new mural downtown.

The mural will be the first in a series that will be made over the next few years downtown.

It's going on the east façade of the HELP Paralegal building (on the corner of Simcoe and Queen streets, close to the provincial courthouse).

Bierk is the son of the late painter David Bierk.

Alex Bierk is known for highly detailed portraits painted in black and white, which he's exhibited lately in Paris and New York City.

But his mural isn't a portrait - it's a black-and-white photo of a single white cloud.

The photo will be printed on a type of opaque vinyl that adheres to rough surfaces such as concrete.

The technique is similar to the large photographic images used to adorn city buses, for example.

"It's a life-sized cloud on the horizon," said Bierk, 34. "It's just simple."

A jury selected Bierk from 23 artists that had submitted proposals.

Most of those artists were from Peterborough, although the competition was also open to artists from other areas nearby (such as Durham).

The jury narrowed it down to a shortlist of three artists: Bierk, John Climenhage of Peterborough and James Ruddle of Pickering.

The three were asked to make mock-ups of their design, and the jury unanimously chose Bierk's proposal over the other two (which were both colourful Kawartha landscape paintings).

On Tuesday night, the three finalists' mock-ups were shown to the city's arts and heritage advisory committee.

Committee members consented unanimously to go with Bierk, the jury's choice. The mural is expected to be installed in late August and be done by Sept. 20.

The total budget for the project, which is funded by the city with help from the Downtown Business Improvement Area association, is \$19,808.20.

That includes artist fees, supplies and the rental of lift equipment.

It also pays for sub-contractors to install the vinyl photo on the building, and for an anti-graffitti lamination over the mural.

Dennis Carter-Edwards, the chairman of the arts, culture and heritage advisory committee, said at the meeting Tuesday that

he initially thought the mural, called Passing Cloud, was too simplistic.

But then again, it occurred to him that artists have always used clouds as an element of landscape painting - so why not a lone cloud?

Ken Doherty, the city's director of community services, said he's expecting some people to find the mural too simple.

"Some will say, 'Well I have a photo of a cloud. Why didn't you put it up there?'" he said.

Not that he agrees; he said he thinks the image will look striking against the massive white façade of the Nordia building behind it.

Wendy Trusler, an artist, was the chairperson for the jury (she did not have a vote).

Trusler said the jury thought the image was "poetic, quieting, unexpected, playful and contemporary."

Terry Guiel, the executive director of the DBIA, wasn't at the meeting. But he said in an interview that he was surprised when he first saw the proposed mural.

"It's a lot more simplistic than I expected," he said. "But for the space, next to the Nordia building - it lends a calming perspective."

"It's going to do what art does best - make people scratch their heads and think."

MURAL JURORS

The jury that unanimously recommended Alex Bierk's mural for the HELP building:

Voting Members:

- Michael Gallant, architect, Lett Architects
- Shirley Clarke, executive assistant and co-owner of HELP Paralegal
- William Kingfisher, artist and curator
- Carolyn Code, artist and former Artspace board member
- Catalina Motta, owner, Catalina's Salon & Vintage Shoppe

Non-Voting Members:

- Wendy Trusler, jury chairwoman and public art co-ordinator for the city
- Erik Hanson, heritage resources co-ordinator for the city

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