



Eric sketching *Dedication*

# Emoting in 3D

The art of transformation is one that muralist Eric Grohe has perfected with his 3D rendition of paintings that are as evocative as they are poignant.

**E**ric Grohe is a man who has managed to make a lot of people smile. Everyday, for close to 40 years. Not because he's a funnyman or because he is great with repartee. It's because his art astounds people – his 3D art that brings buildings to life. Massive buildings that one is just liable to 'walk into', mistaking them for real life. His is the art of transformation. And what starts as a jaw dropping reaction, always ends in a smile.

Working on massive, giant-sized murals (think hundreds of meters), Eric creates paintings that are masterpieces in their own right – larger than life inspirational 3D images that vary from an evocative Statue of Liberty to sublime scenic paintings, each lifelike, reaching out to its viewers. Transforming drab monotone walls into scenes right out of everyday life with the help of 3D imagery, one is amazed not just by the sheer size of Eric's paintings (which often cover façades of multi-storey buildings) but also by the precision of his work.

## Art at Work

Working out the dimensions of the often mammoth designs in tandem with the size of the façades, creating a painting that is redolent and symbolic, and the final 3D rendition – everything about the murals is “the result of moments of inspiration and many hours of sketching,” says the 64-year-old a graphic designer and illustrator.

Eric, who has been crafting these murals for the past 46 years, is emphatic about the kind of work he is trying to create. What initially started out as “just large pictures on walls” quickly changed. “I soon began to realise the great potential that very large exterior artwork can have if integrated architecturally into its

The Liberty Mural



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Bucyrus. Great American Crossroads

environment. This led to an emphasis on the use of strong perspective, sculptural elements and architecture. Shifting from commercial to a fine-art realm, my themes are now more noble and uplifting. With each new project, I am given more opportunity to positively affect the community in which the murals are located," says Eric.

According to Eric, the figurative images that he renders are the most effective way to communicate themes, concepts,

history and create an emotional response in the viewer. For his *Liberty Remembers* in Bucyrus, Ohio, an old brick wall was reinforced with concrete block and transformed into the nationally recognised monument honouring veterans. It depicted Lady Liberty cradling a dying soldier in her arms, surrounded by the portraits of 284 military veterans from Ohio. "While painting the mural, I would have family members or veterans come up to me with tears of gratitude that they or their family was being honoured in this way. I

was also halfway through the painting of the mural when the tragedy of September 11 happened. The mural quickly became a place where people came to mourn, leaving flowers and candles at its base," explains Eric. A book was later published featuring all the photos and stories sent by veterans for the mural.

## Magical Realism

The amazing thing about Eric's murals is the degree of realism in each of them. One is very liable to just 'walk into' into

paintings, mistaking them for an extension of reality. His *Great American Crossroads*, painted on a once soiled, grey wall of the dominating square in Bucyrus Ohio, is one such mural. Depicting the same square in the last century, the mural makes it difficult to figure out where the facing parking lot ends and the wall begins. Making preliminary scale models of the architecture and figures before going full size allows Eric to observe the effects of lighting and relationships of mass and colour. "By the time I start to paint, most



Dedication



The brew room of the Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.

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A detail of the brew room of the Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.



Serenity Road

of the design, drafting and 3-D effects have been worked out at a smaller scale in my studio. The 3-D effect is done through the use of careful perspective drawings and adding visual clues taken from nature that convince the viewer the image has true dimension," he explains.

It's this very dimension play that sets Eric's murals apart. *Dedication*, a mural that has been painted on the wall of the Carmel School of Nursing, Ohio, pays an awe-inspiring tribute to educators, physicians, nurses, employees and volunteers who have served the hospital for over a century. The focal point is a faux arch that frames a group of caregivers attending a patient, flanked by two larger figures.

*Serenity Road*, a mural painted on the side of a Mercedes Benz dealership store, celebrates the elegance, integrity, and quality of both Mercedes Benz craftsmanship, and the characteristics of the 48-year old company.

### The 3D Experience

Working with a team of artists, Eric meticulously transfers the designs from paper onto concrete and brick. The team then paints the mural, using the long staying Keim mineral paint that has been in use for over 130 years. The pigments in it are finely ground minerals in a potassium silicate solution called water glass. Because the raw materials for the pigments were created by natural processes eons ago,

they are extremely stable and do not fade. Typically, Eric takes close to about a year to complete the work, the time period also varies based on the size of the mural.

The size of the murals notwithstanding, for Eric, whatever the mural be, the purpose of creating it is simply to create artwork that affects people and communities in a positive way. He says, "We have people tell us how proud they are to have been involved directly or indirectly and it always inspires us." But perhaps the most poignant words for Eric's works come in the form of a poem by Gina, an inmate of the Washington State Corrections Center for Women. Eric created mural panels for the façade of this state prison and inserted



Sketch of the Florida Hospital mural. It is currently under construction.

them into the existing building. She writes, "I gaze upon the Art to begin a new star/ To put order back into my life/ To let go of the past and doing it fast/ The mural image relieves the strife." ○

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