

# Introductory Guide to Creating a Public Painting

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*Note: I do not claim to be an expert in all of these matters, but I am expert enough that I made it through the process myself and came out with a really high-quality product. So I offer this advice with the best of intentions, hoping it is helpful to others, but there is certainly room for others to bring their own expertise to bear. I welcome feedback and will add it to this document to better help others in the future.*

## **Orientation:**

The site where you will place the mural or painting and how the site is used will largely determine the orientation. But be aware that exposure to the sun will significantly decrease the life of the painting. We were advised by a number of people to be sure to put some kind of roof protection over the painting as well.

## **The Materials and Costs:**

The painting was done on plywood: two-sided MDO, 3/4", 4'x8'. (Less than 3/4" will be weaker, and one-sided will be more vulnerable to weather.) *Note:* Many local lumber/hardware places will not have MDO and may not know what you're talking about. Stick to your guns. You want MDO. Runs about \$100 per sheet.

We used plywood for a number of reasons. First, the owner of the site did not want the painting done on the building. But even if he had allowed that, there are some good reasons to consider doing it on plywood and then applying the wood to the building instead of painting directly. (The gorgeous River Beacon Mural in Beacon, NY, is a great example of a painting that is on a building but was done on plywood first. <http://www.rickprice.net/murals/riverbeacons/rbeacons-intro.htm>)

- 1 – It provides a high-quality surface for working on.
- 2 – It is possible to move the painting if it is ever necessary or desirable to remove it (if the owner changes their mind or a new owner comes along, etc.).
- 3 – It can be painted in an indoor environment at any time of day in any weather.
- 4 – It can be painted at a site that is easily available to the painter, rather than the painter having to come to the eventual placement site to work.
- 5 – If the painting is going to be placed at any height requiring scaffolding or ladders, that equipment is needed only to attach the painting, not do the actual painting.

If any of the edges are dinged or cut or anything like that you can fill them with wood glue or something else before the final priming.

2 coats of primer on top of the primer layer that comes on the MDO. You can use an exterior grade primer from any paint store. We used a quart of 123 ext. primer/multi-surface/mildew resistant. We paid about \$10.

Acrylic paints, not latex, are best. We bought online. That plus the varnish cost about \$170. [www.dickblick.com/categories/acrylics/](http://www.dickblick.com/categories/acrylics/)

For a clear coat, use Liquitex Gloss Medium and Varnish.  
<http://www.dickblick.com/products/liquitex-acrylic-mediums/>

On top of that, use a product called SolVar, also from Liquitex. it acts as a removable layer, where you can spot-remove the varnish (with the graffiti) with a solvent, and then reapply to future protection. You can also get this at dickblick.com, but there's a \$30 hazardous shipping charge, so we just picked it up in Kingston. It cost us \$40.  
<http://www.dickblick.com/products/liquitex-soluvar-varnish/>

As for the structure that supports the painting, we paid about \$250. That includes about \$170 for the wood shakes for the roof. It also includes the cost of the rough-hewn timbers we used as posts which were donated.

For the painting we paid about \$500. For construction of the on-site structure and installation we paid about another \$500.

So the total cost to us was just under \$2,000.

### **The Process:**

1 – I searched for potential sites and found one that was hands down the optimal site.  
2 – I created a draft image and text to be able to show people roughly what I had in mind. This was facilitated by taking digital pictures of the site I had identified so that I could give a rough sense of what it might look like on-site. The text was based on my own research and the images were taken directly from the work of historic painter, Len Tantillo ([www.lftantillo.com](http://www.lftantillo.com)). The guy who did our painting, Matt Maley ([www.mattmaley.com](http://www.mattmaley.com)), also has graphic design experience and from the little work he did on the image itself I think he would probably be great to help with this initial step as well.

3 – I identified the owner. I did not know him, so I identified a person or two who I did know who also know him who could introduce us.

4 – I got the owner's initial interest. Some of his conditions were:

The sign had to be done in a way that could be removed, and he reserved the right to remove it at any time.

He had the right to review and approve the final text and image.

I included a website in the image for people to go to to learn more, but I had to do that as a sticker that could be removed if he or anyone ever objected to the content on that page.

- 5 – I e-mailed the image and text to people on the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Historical Committee (the recognized descendants of the Mohicans and Wappingers in the area) for their feedback/approval of it.
- 6 – After getting the owner's initial interest and the support of the Stockbridge-Munsee folks I contacted, I created a much more polished graphic showing the text and images I wanted to use.
- 7 – The owner of the site approved the final graphic.
- 8 – I got permission from Len Tantillo to use reproductions of his paintings, and he sent me high resolution versions to drop into our graphic.
- 9 – I did need to get Town Approval. This was a bit unusual, in part because the painting was viewed by the town as a sign, not art, and because it is free-standing, not on the building. So the town required me to get a building permit, which in turn required me to get site plan approval. Luckily, the planning board has authority to basically approve something with minor impact without going through a lengthy process and they waived the fee.
- 10 – I found an artist (using Craigslist) who could do a quality job within my budget. His name is Matt Maley and I can highly recommend him. He was great to work with, really went the extra mile, and produced great results. [www.mattmaley.com](http://www.mattmaley.com)
- 11 – I did some grassroots fundraising, seeking donations of any amount to help us cover the costs for the project. (It's important to note that I donated all my time as the project coordinator, which included not only shepherding the project through all phases, but also creating the graphic the painting was based on. I received donations from 21 people plus a \$500 grant from the NYS Quadricentennial Commission. One donation was for \$500, another for \$100, the rest were in the range of \$10-\$50. The total came to \$1,990.
- 12 – I e-mailed the graphic to the painter. He painted it onto a 4x8 piece of plywood.
- A – He filled any dings or cuts with wood glue.
- B – He put two coats of primer on the entire board, especially edges.
- C – He painted the yellow tonal background.
- D – He used a projector to project the entire image onto the board and did a pencil tracing.
- E – He painted all the lettering.
- F – He painted all the imagery.
- G – He added the clear coat and then the SolVar.

Be sure to allow for drying times for every step.

13 – We used donated hand-hewn timbers for the posts. An excavator donated his services and very quickly had the holes dug for the posts. Sonotubes and concrete were placed and poured to support the posts, exactly 8' from edge of post to edge of post to fit the 8' wide plywood. I think we went 3' deep. We did not use a horizontal post to support the bottom of the painting for fear rain water might accumulate there and cause faster degradation.

I think that's it! Good luck to you!