

INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR PUBLIC ART

Artist : Organized by Inner State Gallery & 1xRUN

Location : Detroit USA

Year : 2015

Researcher : Jessica Fiala

In September 2015, 45 artists descended upon Detroit's Eastern Market. Over the course of 9 days, amidst a bevy of activities from artist talks to walking tours, exhibitions, community conversations, and public painting days, they created 47 murals throughout the district.

Murals in the Market was the brainchild of 1xRUN, a fine art publishing company located in the market neighborhood that also runs the associated Inner State Gallery. Over the past 4 years, the company has curated and produced more than 30 mural projects in Eastern Market and over 100 murals across the city. With *Murals in the Market*, 1xRUN sought to heighten their impact by concentrating efforts within their home community.

Adding to the lively festival atmosphere, the community embraced the project. Teachers organized their own field trips to allow students to see the work and talk with artists, and local tourism spiked as visitors came to follow walking tours of the new murals. The public response also took a personal turn, with 1xRun receiving an influx of comments and reflections.¹

Fostering local ownership of the project informed the selection of artists invited, with half of the artists based in Detroit. Two questions guided this focus: "How do we represent our city by the muralists who paint? How can people who travel in be an inspiration to the community?"² This approach is also responsive to Detroit's long history as a majority African American city,³ an aspect of the city that is reflected in a number of the murals. This component of the project also resonated with visitors, who drew inspiration not only from imagery, but also from the artists themselves. Local elementary school art teacher Alana Wynes [commented](#) that "her students had previously struggled to make personal connections to work by black artists in museums. She contrasted that experience with the immediacy of seeing a young artist of color, dressed in familiar jeans and a T-shirt, working on a piece."⁴

The project also connected business owners, workers, and artists to strengthen the community of stakeholders in the diverse and long-standing Eastern Market. At 125

¹ Researcher conversation with Roula David, Chief Operating Officer, 1xRUN, January 11, 2016.

² Ibid

³ The most recent census data (2010) lists Detroit's population identifying as Black or African American alone as making up 82.7% of the city. (United States Census Bureau. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2622000.html> Accessed January 29, 2016)

⁴ Quoted in Abbey-Lambertz, Kate. "How a Public Art Fest Made A Real Change In A Detroit Neighborhood." Huffington Post. October 1, 2015.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/detroit-murals-in-the-market_us_560aad5de4b0af3706dde4b5

years old, Eastern Market is the longest continuously running food market in the United States and has been a place to build a livelihood for generations of diverse immigrants and ethnic groups. The market's 5-block footprint is the nexus of a district food hub replete with wholesalers, retailers, food processors, and a regular night market that runs midnight to 5 a.m., supplying food industries across the city. Jela Ellefson, Grants / Community Development Director for Eastern Market Corporation, described the central market as a meeting place for disparate cultural and socio economic groups. Here public art "softens the edges of industry" and draws people out of the main market into other sections of the district, serving as "a conduit for people to feel safe to explore."⁵

In infusing public art into the district, 1xRUN is collaborating closely with Eastern Market Corporation and both have an eye on the long-term and a concern to hedge the advancement of gentrification and ensure that the district maintains the vitality and diversity that have been its backbone for over a century. Partnering with building owners, Eastern Market Corporation is balancing converting older properties to mixed purpose sites with moves that support the modernization and food safety improvements needed by local businesses working in the food industry.

These efforts are all unfolding in the aftermath of Detroit's historic 2013 bankruptcy and in the midst of citywide conversations about revitalization and attracting investment. As the city continues to wrestle to rebuild and rebrand itself, a second iteration of *Murals in the Market* is already in the planning stages. In this pocket of the city, artists and residents seek a balance that continues to be a challenge for Detroit as a whole – crafting a future that does not fail to respect and serve the character, history, and diverse populations that made the city what it is.

⁵ Researcher conversation with Jela Ellefson, Grants / Community Development Director, Eastern Market Corporation. January 19, 2016.