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'PUBLIC ART SHOULD SERVE A SOCIAL GOOD'

Colorful brothers' art activism literally makes the world a brighter place

Using disabled and disadvantaged artists to beautify public spaces, the Portraits of Hope initiative will this weekend hold a 24-hour paint-a-thon to benefit LA animal shelters

By [LISA KLUG](#) | 2 March 2017, 5:13 am



Bernie (left) and Ed Massey, co-founders of Portraits of Hope, in a laundromat with machines laminated in art by Portraits of Hope. (Laura Paresky Gould)

LOS ANGELES — Brothers Ed and Bernie Massey have a long history of creating iconic landmark makeovers. Sometimes likened to artists [Christo and Jeanne-Claude](#), the Masseys' vibrant art relies on a distinct method: They apply brilliantly colored canvases to everything from airplanes and blimps to tugboats and race cars.

But the artists painting those canvases are the disabled, diseased and disadvantaged — working from schools, hospitals, social service programs and other venues. Their efforts combine to literally make the world a brighter place.

"Public art should serve a social good," sculptor and painter Ed Massey told The Times of Israel.

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[Portraits of Hope](#), the creative, therapeutic non-profit the Masseys co-founded, brings together kids and adults of all ages as well as corporate sponsors and a host of volunteers. Their copyrighted designs have covered lifeguard stations, New York taxi cabs, air traffic control towers and more.

Their next target? LA County’s animal shelters. The initiative, whose aim is to drive the public to visit shelters and leave with new pets, officially launches this weekend. Prep sessions have been underway over the past few months.

“Portraits of Hope selects public settings, venues and symbols for its visual makeovers that people take for granted or have come to expect will continue to be the same that they’ve always been,” says Ed, the artist of the operation, whom his brother describes as the project’s “creative genius.”



A young artist working on a Portraits of Hope collaboration. (Courtesy)

Their initiatives provide the opportunity to “vibrantly transform them into major public art works or places of destination,” he says.

Their current aspiration, attracting more people to animal shelters, translates to “more animals going home — a new home,” says Ed. “Bernie and I believe that this initiative should serve as a catalyst and trigger other jurisdictions to think creatively about how to engage the public to promote and significantly increase pet adoptions in their regions and make their shelters more appealing public spaces.”

The project also incorporates educational, creative therapy and civic leadership sessions to support the ideals of the project: to show the public how working together can effect change.



An airplane plastered with work from Portraits of Hope. (Paul Bowen)

“I love that children from previous Portraits of Hope projects helped inspire the initiative,” says Bernie. “The fact that so many children — many vulnerable themselves — will be part of the process to help vulnerable animals find a home is very powerful.”

To make sure each session can accommodate any and all likely painters, Portraits of Hope provides even the most off-beat supplies and tools.

“*We never turn anyone away*”

“We never turn anyone away,” says Bernie, who, as his brother’s partner, manages and leads the public education components about health care, medical research, ethnic equality and more. “The civic education we do in schools makes the world relevant.”

Participants who cannot hold brushes in their hands use special instruments they control with their mouths. Extended paintbrushes attached to telescoping handles and hockey sticks allow some volunteer artists to reach the floor from a seated position and wheelchairs. Braille elements incorporated into the black outlines surrounding the designs guide the blind to color within the lines. There is even a Portraits of Hope paintbrush that can attach to shoes.

“After we conclude, we donate 75 percent of the art to social service institutions across the country,” Bernie says. “We leave a certain amount for other institutions to auction... We are really protective of our visuals because it is our signature. It’s what we’re known for.”

To date, the Massey brothers have initiated nearly 25 large-scale projects on the human condition and many smaller ones.

“Most of the projects have been US-based, but we have also done projects in Japan and Mexico, and receive inquiries about expanding our geographic reach. We would like to,” Bernie says. “For LA County alone, we expect between 8,000 to 10,000 participants.”



Firetrucks at Fire Station No. 1 in Snowmass-Wildcat, Colorado, decked out in art by Portraits of Hope. (Courtesy)

The animal shelter initiative has the support of [Maddie's Fund](#), a family foundation Workday co-founder Dave Duffield and his wife, Cheryl, endowed with more than \$300 million. The funds are directed toward increased community lifesaving, shelter medicine education, and pet adoptions across the US.

"This is a fabulous opportunity to harness the power of art to connect people with homeless pets," says Amy Zeifang, a member of the Maddie's Fund Executive Leadership Team.

"Research shows that 33 million people plan to acquire a pet this year, and only 7.2 million pets need to find homes... we wholeheartedly believe this initiative will positively enhance the image of animal shelters in Los Angeles County, attracting the community to choose the shelter to adopt a pet, while also calling attention to the thousands of young people and community members who made it all possible."

Over the years, Portraits of Hope has involved more than 100,000 people of all ages including at rehabilitative centers, the Braille Institute, Special Olympics, scouts, after-school programs, universities and more. A number of TV programs including "Law & Order," "Rachael Ray," "The Bachelor," as well as news reports at home and abroad have also featured the Masseys' efforts.

"Many millions more have come face to face with our works as they tend to culminate in highly visible and accessed public spaces," Bernie says.

Raised Jewish, the brothers don't identify as particularly observant, although, as Bernie explains, "Our value system is recognizable. In terms of values, it is core to who we are as people."

The projects are decidedly democratic.

"I'm not an artist at all," says Bernie. "But I love the power of the visual. And I love the collaborative experience. We work with every demographic. You name it: culture, religion, geographic region, wealth or lack thereof... We're all on the same team on this project."

In LA, the county contracts with 49 different municipalities and processes more animals in its shelters than any other jurisdiction in the US — more than 80,000 animals a year. The Masseys hope to involve an even greater number of shelters throughout the country in the next two to three years.



A couple of Portraits of Hope artists at work. (Courtesy)



Cyclists stop to look at the 'Spheres at MacArthur Park' project in Los Angeles. (Courtesy)

Their track record is already substantial. Their “Summer of Color,” artwork covering lifeguard stations on Southern California beaches comprised the largest scale public art project in the US, and perhaps the world.

During “Garden in Transit,” New York taxi cabs got a surprising facelift with Portraits of Hope flowers adorning roofs, hoods and trunks. When observers spot one of these signature cabs in Los Angeles, it is a relic shipped cross-country.



3,000 decorated spheres covered MacArthur Park in Los Angeles in Portraits of Hope's last major project there. (Courtesy)

As in other Portraits of Hope projects, the animal shelter effort is privately funded and led by civic-spirited foundations, businesses and individuals sharing the organization's goals.

Portraits of Hope will hold a 24-hour-paint-a-thon for the public on March 4-5 at Plaza El Segundo, south of Los Angeles International Airport.

The 24-hour paint-a-thons first started in New York during the Garden in Transit project, while the last one in LA occurred in 2015 for the “Spheres at MacArthur Park” project, when 11,000 people participated to help make 3,000 floating spheres at the historic park.

The artwork produced in early March will help revitalize the shelters, the latest in the Portraits of Hope's public art and civic initiatives.

Reservations can be made to poh@portraitsofhope.org