

## Portraits of Hope

By Melonie Magruder

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*November 15, 2010* -- The seeds of Ed Massey's Portraits of Hope, a sponsor of Downtown's Winterlit festival, were sown 15 years ago when the Columbia University-trained artist saw the value of a creative therapy program for children in pediatric facilities.

As an artist used to provoking social conscience as well as creating beauty, Massey instinctively recognized the spiritual triumph inherent in collaborative public art projects.

While a student in sociology at UCLA, Massey's sculptures were accepted for juried fine art competitions (an unprecedented honor for a non-fine art major) and realized the opportunities in art as social relevance.

One of his first major art installations, "Corporate Ladder," depicted a life-size tableau of office workers fighting each other to ascend to the top. Installed in the lobby of a Washington D.C. building owned by a corporate financial titan, the sculpture sparked almost as much controversy as another piece, "Morality/Mortality," a study of the dehumanizing effects on society of sexual assault.

Lassoing the power of art as public statement, Massey began to work with brother Bernie to develop projects reflecting social issue campaigns and public education. With Portraits of Hope, the Massey brothers drew together children who were desperately ill or disabled and communities in need of a touch of sunshine. The result was massive public art projects that bedecked taxis, blimps, airplanes, lifeguard towers and old oil derricks, painted by children who normally didn't get the opportunities for artistic expression.

“Some of the kids at the Braille Institute (who provided some of the paneling for the “Ice” project) told me that they had never painted before,” Ed said at the opening of the public ice rink in downtown Santa Monica Wednesday. “Think of that. But we gave them a certain template to follow, where they could feel the ridges outlining the design. Being able to be a part of creating beauty is a marvelously therapeutic experience.”

Massey’s floral theme, rendered in a bright, pop art style, interjects a strong symbol of life into landscapes that are frequently colorless and nature-less. In 2008, Massey’s series of panels were distributed in New Orleans and the Gulf area to help revitalize transitional housing and public buildings devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The panels painted for “Ice” were created by children from a number of local organizations, from the Westside Special Olympics to patients in children’s hospitals, using specially adapted paintbrushes and templates designed by Massey.

“Anyone can paint,” Massey said. “You just need the chance.”