

Uptown's Place-Making Project: Magma: the Mural.



Overview:

Uptown is a unique area in Auckland, that includes 3 main or arterial roads, and encompasses four distinct suburbs: Grafton, Newton, Eden Terrace and Mt Eden. It became a major focus for Uptown to create a sense of 'place' and cohesion, while bringing some colour and life into the area, in place of a 'town centre'. In the heart of Uptown is a water reservoir that presents a large concrete facade, and the ideal space to create a piece of vibrant, colourful artwork to provoke some much needed connection, conversation, and engagement with the area.

Description:

In June 2016 Uptown, which operates as a Business Improvement District (BID), decided to address the area's lack of a community 'heart' and quality open public space, by commissioning a piece of artwork or mural, for the large blank concrete wall of the water reservoir in the centre of the Uptown area. It was widely accepted that the 512sqm blank concrete wall also served as a target for graffiti and vandalism, and a mural would provide a deterrent as well as an uplifting, place-making piece of art.

Consent for the mural project was given by the appropriate authorities; and a number of different artists were given the opportunity to pitch their ideas for the mural. The artist chosen was Sara Hughes, a renowned New Zealand artist, who chose to conceptualise the volcanic landscape of Auckland, into an abstract mural. Sponsorship was sought through a local paint supply shop, Resene, to supply the paint necessary to prepare and complete the mural, along with funding sponsorship from a local art dealer, recruitment firm and architecture company, as well as funds from the BID.

In January 2017, Sara Hughes and her team of artists started creating the mural titled "Magma". In Sara's words: the mural is a 'volcanic scape', abstract in form yet influenced by the history and geography of the area. The piece uses red, orange, pink and yellow colours and is evocative of Auckland's volcanic landscape. The whole project took two weeks to complete, and garnered some excellent [local media coverage](#).

The logistics behind the project proved challenging, and threw up some interesting hurdles. Scaffolding was needed to assist the artist with painting the wall. In order to put up the scaffolding and provide sufficient and safe space around it, Uptown had to arrange to close the public carpark the wall borders for the duration of the project. This required agreement from the surrounding businesses, which was given due to the work being scheduled for the first two weeks of the New Year, and there was no real demand for the parks during that timeframe. The issue of the timing of

the project was also weather dependent, as the project needed to be completed during a period of good, dry weather to allow the paint to dry and adhere properly.

Another challenge was the creative process of transferring a visual concept, into what is now the largest outdoor mural in the southern hemisphere. While the artist provided concept drawings and colour options over laid on location photos, the mural was never going to be the exact replica, so Uptown's relationship with the artist and communicating the aim of the project was vital. Then there was the physical challenge of the texture and surface of the wall which was a rough concrete, and not the ideal canvas for paint. This was where the relationship with the paint supply company, Resene, allowed us to organise the best primer product to prepare the wall before painting. The proper preparation of the wall's textured surface allowed the artist to use it to her advantage, and make it into a feature of the mural itself, adding another, natural element to the meaning behind the mural.

Outcomes:

Overall, the project has succeeded well beyond expectations. In the year it has been up, there has been no reports of graffiti, tagging or vandalism of any kind. The feedback from the local business community and public has been universally positive, and the mural has become an attraction for public use as a backdrop in wedding photos, fashion photo shoots, 'selfies' and it has also appeared on the cover of a magazine.

Uptown held a special launch event to unveil the commemorative plaque attached to the mural, noting the details about the mural, it's meaning, and it's supporters and sponsors. Auckland Mayor, Hon. Phil Goff attended and was invited to do the official unveiling along with the artist, Sara Hughes. All local Uptown businesses, residents, local politicians and media were invited along for the afternoon, followed by drinks and nibbles at a local café with a perfect view of the mural.

Thanks to "Magma", Uptown has been put on the map, and we are extremely proud to call it ours.

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