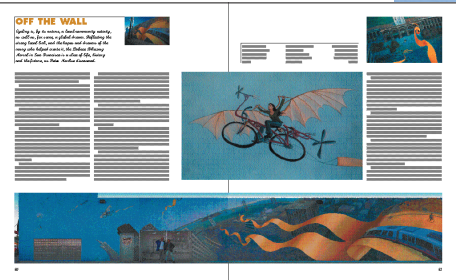


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The Duboce bikeway mural in San Francisco: a remarkable community achievement, and wonderfully optimistic cycling art – Page 26



Bikes from wire: Claude Marthaler reports from Africa on the craftsmen who make wire bicycles: the reality of their lives, their hopes and ambitions – Page 20



Birdy folding bike, Lightspin dynamo and Hobie pedal canoe – real users report – starts page 32

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MURAL MAGIC
THE WIRE-BIKE PHENOMENON
BIRDY, LIGHTSPIN, HOBIE TESTS

VELOVISION

ON THE WALL

Cycling is, by its nature, a community activity, as well as, for some, a global dream. Reflecting the strong local link, and the hopes and dreams of the many who helped create it, the Duboce Bikeway Mural in San Francisco is a slice of life, history and the future, as Peter Nurkse discovered.



In many of the largest modern cities, traffic follows the footpaths of the distant past. Those footpaths usually followed the lie of the land, the easiest way to walk.

In San Francisco, the Ohlone Indians used to take a path from their village, on the more sheltered Bay side of the city, out to the beaches and cliffs by the ocean. When the Spanish settlers came they put a Mission, with fields and agriculture, on the sheltered side, and built a Presidio, a fort to guard the Golden Gate, on the ocean side.

Like the Indians, the Spanish walked that same path. And then the early American pioneers followed in their tracks. For everyone, taking a path between two rocky outcrops was the obvious route between the two sides of San Francisco: the Bay and the ocean.

Today the San Francisco branch of the US Government Mint sits on top of one of these outcrops, but the route is still there: you can still follow it instinctively among the buildings below. Whether you are walking, or riding a bike, the route takes you along back and forth on the streets that follow the lowest points. Streets starting with Duboce Avenue, right underneath the Mint, and then going in the direction of the Haight Ashbury area, always following the lowest path.

Street cars come this way too, and they emerge from an underground tunnel, bringing up to 50,000 people a day past one special two-block stretch of Duboce Avenue. This small length was recently closed to car traffic, leaving it to walkers and cyclists and the street cars.

And now, facing the bike path, is a mural, the Duboce Bikeway Mural, 340 feet long and 18 feet high, all along the back wall of the Market St. Safeway supermarket. It took three years of work, five months of painting, and over two hundred people and groups and organisations to complete. It is about bicycling, but also about people, and walking, and transportation, and politics, and economics, and ecology, and a journey of the spirit.

The mural begins with simple blue air, blue space. And in this space are fantastic human powered flying machines: a dirigible and a couple of aeroplanes. Mona Caron is piloting the closest plane, her arms raised to flap the wings. Mona was the Lead Artist on the mural, responsible for the overall design.

Below, the towering skyscrapers of corporate San Francisco (Transamerica Pyramid on the left, and next to it the old Bank of America building) bend back and scowl up at the aerial passers-by. The skyscrapers seem rooted to the ground, unable to take flight. Perhaps that is part of their problem, why they are so cross.

The skyscrapers include in their middle a back door to the Safeway store behind the mural, covered with graffiti. Graffiti artists have generally left the mural alone, not just because it is covered with three layers of graffiti resistant varnish, but because they were invited to help paint the mural. They declined, as it was paintbrush rather than spray can art. Given this, it'd have been perhaps cruel to deny them any place at all for self-expression, so this door



BOTTOM

Mona Caron, lead artist, and Joel Pomerantz, project co-ordinator, stand in front of the mural

BELOW A detail

from the beginning of the mural – taking flight with human power

RIGHT Critical Mass

rounds the corner – as trails of flying dreamers flutter above



was carefully left for them. And they have been careful to use it.

Now the scene changes to the end of Market Street at the old Ferry Building (where ferries still arrive and leave: some of the old routes have been reopened recently). And in the street right below you see a terrible traffic jam, the entire street clogged and jammed with cars, almost all the way back to the Ferry Building. But it's six o'clock, and around the far corner, turning right, ready to engage the jam, come the Critical Mass bike riders, out on their monthly ride together.

These riders seem as if they're coming to work on the traffic jam, to eat away at it, eventually to finish it off or, perhaps, to transcend it. Along the right side we see some of the buildings of traditional transportation industries: the former Southern Pacific building down at the end, and a couple of buildings up the Matson Line building, where the technology and industry of containers was developed.

But our view is more and more obstructed by golden banners floating in the air, trailed behind the aerial flyers high above the chaos and tumult below in the streets. These banners are dreams, the dreams of the flyers, and we are now going to be swept up into one particular banner, into the dream of one particular flyer. We can't even see this flyer: we're inside the dream.

The dark and grimy buildings fade away, and the continuing traffic chaos disappears below. The tail of this banners merge, and a street car appears, the route





'N Desire' car. Here is one sign we are in a dream, because the actual San Francisco street car is the 'N Judah'. At the same time bicyclists appear, including a high-wheeler, and also a future part of the mural itself on a wall, which we'll see later in the mural itself. So here, in the middle of the mural, we see the end, a red bicycle by the ocean.

But here in the middle, a lot is going on. People are travelling in different directions. Around the corner, on the right, coming toward us, all dressed up in fancy clothes, are Eddie B and Brenda, a homeless couple who found the mural painters a rug and some chairs. They laughed when they saw themselves painted in the mural.

Mona Caron is sitting on the wall at this corner, while Joel Pomerantz, who co-ordinated the mural for the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, is looking over on her right. With them is Gordon Dean, both a bicyclist and a painter. It was Joel who followed up on the original idea for the mural from Peter Tannen, the city bicycling programs manager, who won the original Department of Transportation grant. The \$15,000 just covered the

paint – quality mural paint – and the protective coats of varnish to cover the 340 foot long wall. Joel found another \$19,000 in grants from foundations and individuals to do the mural itself.

On the angled surface at the corner are the names of the people and organisations who contributed. Joel is the Co-ordinator and Mona is the Lead Artist. But there were six other Artists, and over fifty Muralists: a lot of people put their time and energies into this project. San Francisco Beautiful, a civic group, and the Zellerbach Foundation contributed further grants, as did many individuals. And during the design stage, there was much community input, from groups including the Bicycle Coalition. And also input from individuals, such as people bicycling by or passing by on the street cars, who couldn't resist stopping and talking about the work in progress.

These are some of the people who appear in the mural itself, at this particular corner:

- David Miles, roller blading. David is the Skate Patrol leader in Golden Gate Park.

RIGHT
Clare Corcoran rides by a streetcar named Desire



- Jim Barcelona, riding the highwheeler, in a colourful striped shirt
- Tristan Savatier, photographer. Tristan did the pictures for the Web page and many of those for this article, and here he is shown photographing the mural.
- Claire Corcoran, also riding, from the San Francisco Bicycle Ballet
- Mary Brown, riding no hands in her classic hat
- The couple on the train is Ekaterina da Brundashvilli and her fiancé, Graham
- Laura Mayer, the woman on the train, who was managing a World Wrapps restaurant nearby when the mural was being painted, and who dedicated her store community relations budget to feeding muralists
- Mel, the closer person sitting on the bench, who was living on the street during the last two months of the mural painting
- Jim Swanson, hand on the building at the corner, holding a copy of Sixrag, the newspaper celebrating the sixth anniversary of the Critical Mass rides

- Jim's talking to Chris Carlsson, who started Critical Mass, along with Joel and Jim and a few others

- Allison Light and David Powers, the couple walking along next to Jim and Chris. David didn't turn out looking like himself, so the muralists made him into someone quite different, to see his reaction when he saw that stranger walking along with Allison (he loved it).

- Tony, the man pushing the stroller down into the street, the child in stroller carrying a bunny toy

So much detail here at this point in the mural, so much going on. Yet the first work to do after the design was broad blended-colour backgrounds. This is where people who were not artists had a useful job to do, laying down those backgrounds. Then came the details: buildings, trees, streetcars, and so on. And people were the last to be added. If Mona hadn't been pried away from the mural the evening before the inauguration (November 22, 1998), there would probably be even more people. But everything has to end, and the mural needed





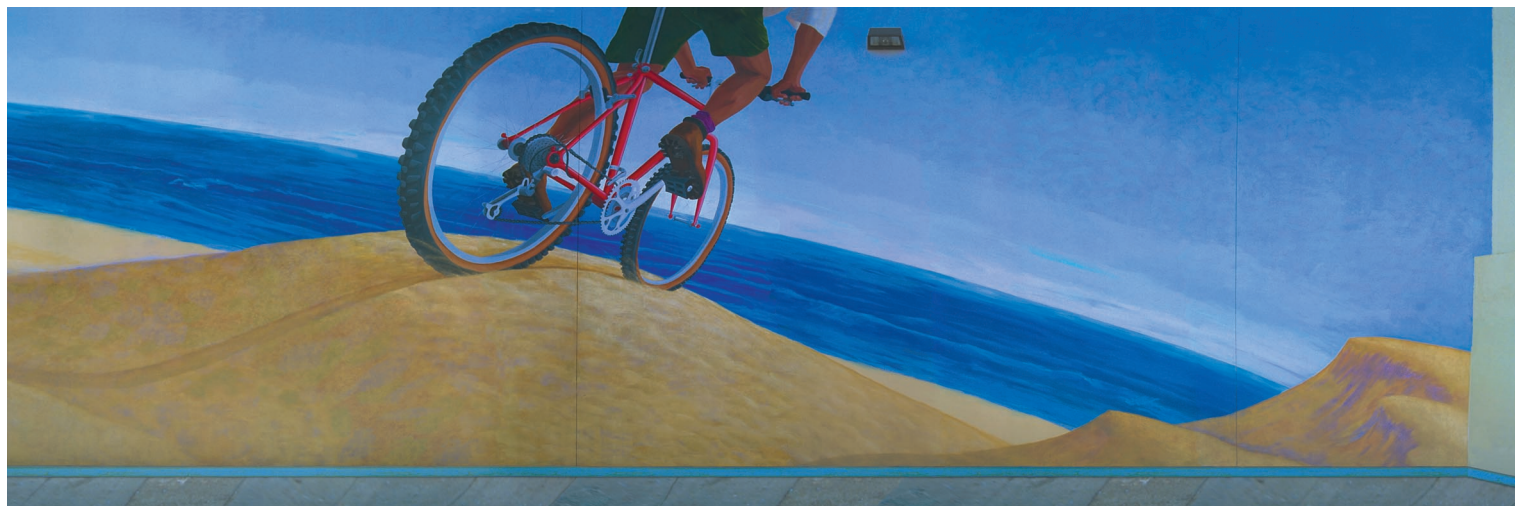
an end, a final point. It would be tempting to keep on adding to it, but then it would be missing completion.

Now the mural begins to change. From this intricate detail and complexity, gradually things simplify, and we start to leave the city. There's a small stream of water disappearing into the street drain under the Duboce sign: let's follow it back up the stream. Names of streets appear on the surface of the water, those same streets that people follow today to get over to the Haight Ashbury.

The stream turns into a bike path in front of the brightly painted houses. There's a solid red Communist house on the corner, with a Cuban flag in the window. And up the street, a Gay house, with a rainbow flag. Also a Tibetan house across the street, with a Buddha in the window. Other colours, and other groups and cultures, for other houses. And also one solid grey house, no colour, a token conservative house.

Now the grey city of the first part of the mural has changed to a village, a group of houses together, with a visible culture and life of their own. But another change is ahead, because the moon rises (a very accurate full moon, which took a lot of work to make exact). A skunk patrols the road, against the background of Golden Gate Park, which stretches from the Haight Ashbury three miles to the ocean. The wall surface begins to flake, and a serpent appears, breaking up the hard asphalt surface until it all crumbles away into sand.

BELOW The end of the road: just a bike and the ocean for company



ABOVE LEFT
J. Gordon Dean and
Mona Caron,
muralists, sit on the
ledge while Joel
Pomerantz looks
over in his funny hat

ABOVE CENTRE
AND RIGHT
The brightly-coloured
houses of the Haight
Ashbury signal the
change from big city
to village as the
mural sweeps on
towards the ocean



We're out in the sand, between San Francisco and the ocean. Instead of seeing buildings and streetcars, we're now looking at life very closely. We can even see a bug crossing the tyre-print of a passing bike. Also a lizard, and very meticulously drawn plants and flowers. The streetcar passengers passing by included authorities on local plants and flowers, who contributed to the mural.

The view simplifies more and more. The ocean begins to appear, at first in a cove, and then the open sea. A Snowy Plover, a local threatened species, looks out while another beetle makes its way, leaving miniscule tracks on the sand. Life on a very small scale.

And now in the final scene there is a bicycle. But a generic bicycle, with a generic rider, only seen from the waist down, so possibly anyone on a red bike. Out in front are sand dunes, without features or details, and then beyond them the glimmering horizon of the open ocean.

Starting out in the infinite potential of the blue skies at the beginning of the mural, we got bogged down in the downtown traffic jams of modern city life. Then we were lifted away into a golden dream, where people ride and skate and bicycle and walk. And then we followed the water upstream into a village, which merged into a park, and then into nature itself, with only a bike track to show the human presence. At the end, as at the beginning, we are facing some immense potential – there blue skies, and here the open ocean. With a bike for company.

Credits and resources

Our thanks to Mona Caron, Joel Pomerantz, J. Gordon Dean and the many others who helped in the compilation of this article.

Much more information can be found on the mural website www.monacaron.com/mural.html, including details of the design, the materials and paints used, and a full list of contributors.

The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition has produced a series of seven photo cards which side-by-side create an eight foot long image of the mural wall. The coalition also sells a T-Shirt featuring the Paintbike logo drawn by Mona Caron, in different sizes and short and long sleeves. The set of photo cards and the T-Shirt each sell for \$10-\$20, on a sliding scale. If you're interested, contact the SFBC for details at the address below.

Photos by Tristan Savatier except those credited to Denise Silverman.

Photoshop editing by J. Gordon Dean. Cover by Roy Harrington – see page 3.

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Peter Nurkse and the Velo Vision team



A cyclist takes the
vegetables home



The Paintbike logo by
Mona Caron

Muralist J. Gordon
Dean at work, giving
wings to a flyer

Streetcar riders
added their
expertise to the
mural effort, keeping
the anatomy of the
fauna depicted
strictly accurate

