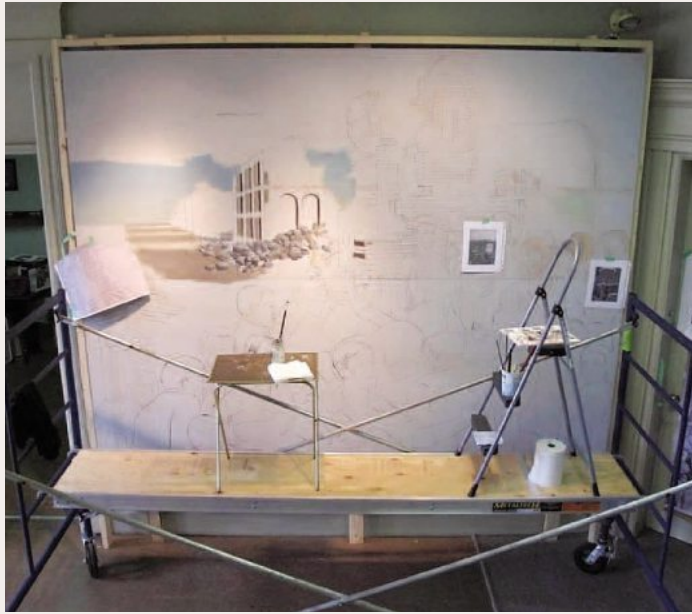
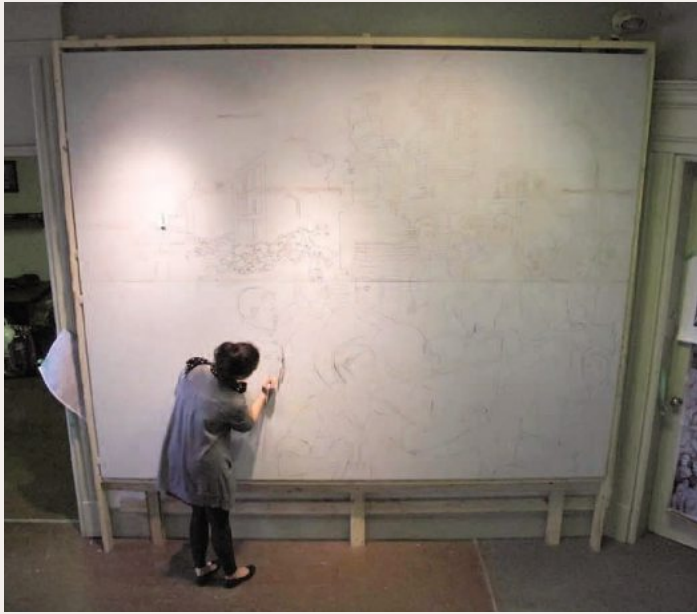
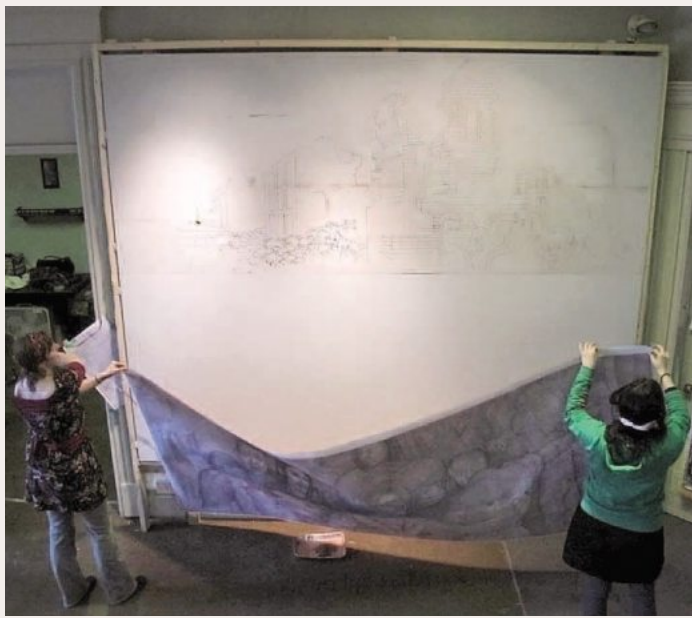
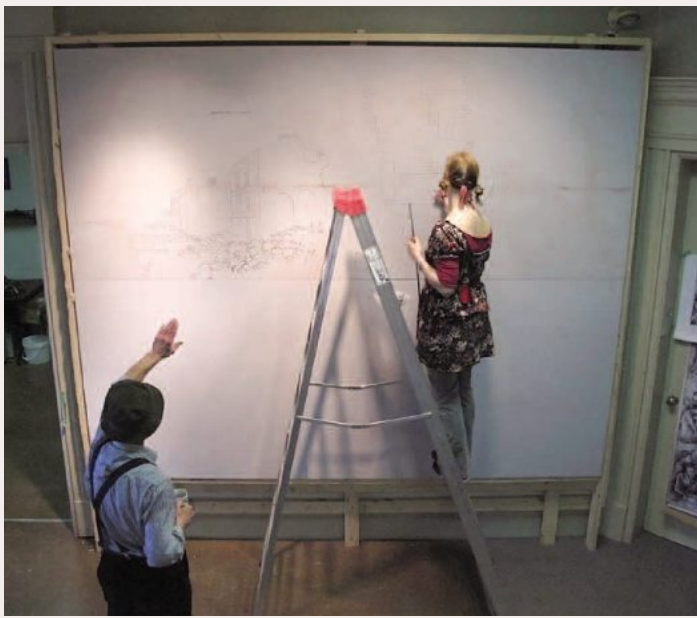


INTERVIEW Violinist Jasper Wood solos
with Symphony New Brunswick S2

IN THE GALLERIES Ingrid Mueller Art +
Concepts presents Port City artists S3

salon



PHOTOS: JAMES WILSON

Lost and found

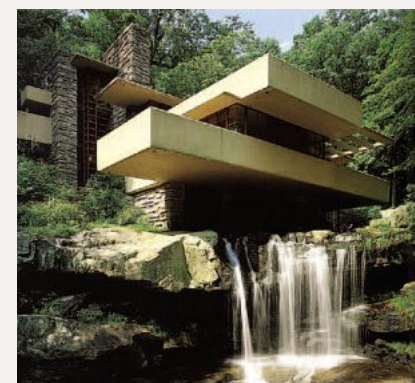
On this day, exactly 63 years ago at 9 p.m., the families of Fredericton High School students killed in the Second World War gathered at the school for the unveiling of a memorial mural by 21-year-old Saint John painter Fred Ross. One of the largest paintings in New Brunswick, it was one of only a few such murals commissioned and realized in Canada at the time. It was to be a permanent reminder of the fallen's valiant spirits, but after decades of neglect and desecration it disappeared ... until now. Story by Mike Landry

timeline

May 12, 1927:
Fred Ross is born in Saint John.

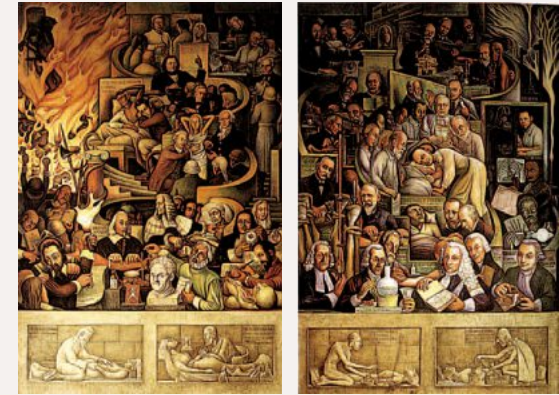


1939: Frank Lloyd Wright completes 'Fallingwater,' near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The house inspired the architecture in Ross' 'Rebuilding the World Through Education.'



1940: Symeon Shimin's 'Contemporary Justice and the Child' is installed in Washington, D.C. Ross visited Shimin studio in New York City while staying in Pegi Nicol MacLeod's apartment, and it strongly influenced the FHS murals.

1943-44: Diego Rivera's 'History of Cardiology.' Ross was greatly influenced by the great Mexican muralist, and even used some of his pay from the FHS murals to visit Mexico. You can see the compositional inspiration here, with the peaking structure and the grey lower panels, that Ross would use for FHS.



1944: 'Side Street' – a lithograph Fred Ross did as a 16-year-old student that appeared in the February issue of the Maritime Art Association Bulletin, which remarked "He is showing most promising talent."

1945: A group of Saint John Vocational School art students at the New Brunswick Museum studying decorative art. Ross is the third student from the left.



Mural Artist

Freddie Ross, Untrained 18-Year-Old, Paints School Wall in Saint John, N.B.

In Saint John, New Brunswick, people are watching a young high school student. It started some months ago, when his class at the Vocational School was given a mural design for homework. He brought in his contemporary sketch and the school suddenly took it seriously. Spurned was selected on a state funding and he was told to go ahead.

Freddie Ross, 18, was born in Saint John, New Brunswick. He is the son of a family of

Spring 1946:

Ross finishes his first mural at Saint John Vocational School, 'Annual School Picnic.'

On **June 21** 'The Montreal Standard' runs an anonymous multi-page feature on 'Frederick Ross, untrained 18-year-old.' Soon after, FHS commissions Ross, at \$700, for a memorial.

Aug. 10, 1946: An initial study for 'Rebuilding the World Through Education.'



Sept. 9, 1946: An abandoned study for 'The Destruction of War,' with Hitler and Mussolini.

Recreating Ross

With less than a month left in the monumental undertaking to recreate Fred Ross' lost Fredericton High School murals, Mike Landry looks at the legend and the man behind the myth.

Once again, all eyes are on Fred Ross. Even at 84 years old, he commands attention just as he did when he was a headstrong young man wowing the national art scene half a century ago.

In the centre of his uptown Saint John studio, photographer James Wilson and artist Fred Willar silently wait with trepidation for Ross' verdict.

Wilson and Willar have come to the studio today at the great artist's request. Ross wants Willar to pose for a photograph recreating the central figure – "The Strider" – of his 1948 mural *The Destruction of War*.

Ross orchestrates the operation from his wheelchair, transforming it from a sign of infirmity to a director's chair of power. He gets Willar, himself 72 years old, to shakily stand on an ottoman, while Wilson frames the shot. As Willar and Wilson prepare, Ross inches closer and closer before interrupting them.

"Sorry, but I have to see what you're doing," Ross says. "I have to see through the lens." "You won't be able to, Fred. It's too high," Wilson, nodding to his camera on a tripod a good two feet above Ross, says. "I'll show it to you after I shoot it."

"No, but, then it's too late," Ross says. "I have to see what you're shooting. I think you'll have to back up quite a bit further."

Wilson ignores Ross.

"Well, you show me when you get it, then," Ross concedes, but not without adding, "photographers are all temperamental."

Wilson takes one quick shot, and hands the camera to Ross. The artist pulls out his glasses

with cracked frames from under his sweater and looks back and forth from the camera's display to the life-sized blow-up of *The Strider* taped to his studio wall.

Ross finally breaks the silence. "I think it's darn good, Jamie."

The photograph study is just a tiny part of a massive \$125,000 project by the University of New Brunswick to recreate Ross' 1948 Fredericton High School murals – *The Destruction of War* and *Rebuilding the World Through Education*. Begun officially on Jan. 1, the murals are to be completed by June 14 and unveiled on June 27.

At a massive six-by-six metres combined, the murals were possibly the largest paintings in New Brunswick when completed. Ross began the work straight out of Saint John Vocational School, and he was just 21 years old when they were unveiled.

Dealing with the great themes of civilization – war and peace, destruction and hope – Ross designed the murals to be monumental and national in scope and size. They were, after all, commissioned by the FHS Student Government Association in 1946, for \$700, as a memorial for FHS students who died in the Second World War. Although common in the United States, murals of this type were rare in Canada following the war.

"It should never be forgotten by those now attending this school, and by those who will follow in the years to come, the deep debt of gratitude they owe to these gallant boys," David MacLaren, then lieutenant-governor, said during the unveiling ceremony of the original murals. "You must not fail them!"

Unfortunately, fail them we did. Although "permanent" was used more than a dozen times in speeches when the murals were unveiled, Ross' murals have been lost.

No one can say precisely what happened or when they were misplaced. It would have been sometime between 1976 and '84 when

the murals could not be found for a planned retrospective of Ross' work at the UNB Art Centre. The story of Ross' FHS murals has since become a legend in Fredericton – the city's own lost city of Atlantis and Amber Room.

The murals were first taken down from the old Fredericton High School in 1954 when the assembly hall where they were hanging was renovated into classrooms. The murals – each composed of five panels – were cut into three sections and stored in the FHS book-store.

As time passed and memories faded, the murals were used for the bookstore's flooring. Installed with the painting facing down and several holes punctured in the panels, the mistake wasn't discovered until 1967.

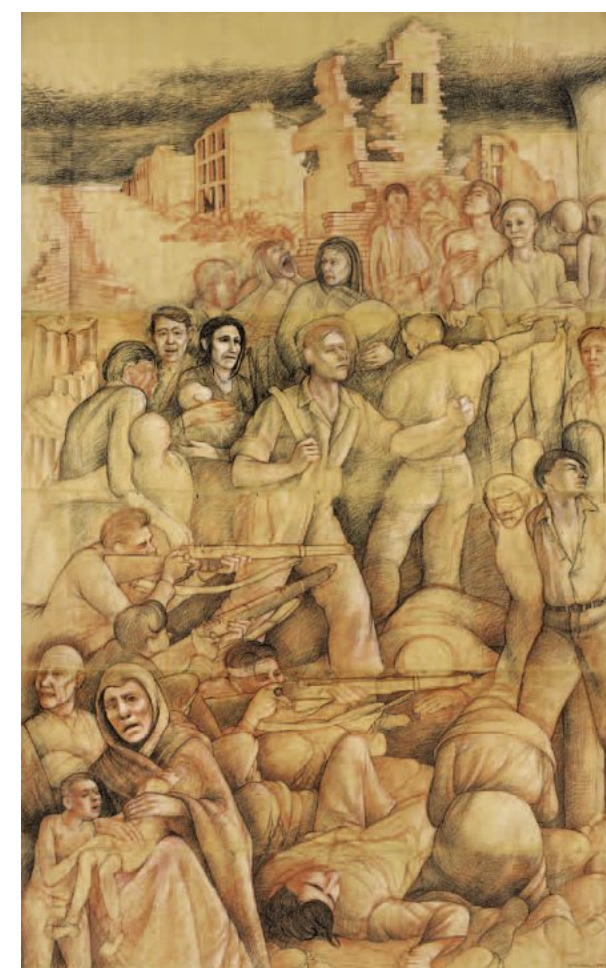
The panels were salvaged and moved to the Charlotte Street Elementary School and then Doak Road Elementary. It was here where a panel was plastered over – and irreparably damaged – by a maintenance worker in need of a piece of wall board.

Moved again to the new Fredericton High School, the panels were reassembled on the basement floor and Ross was contacted in 1976 to possibly restore the work. The school never came up with \$5,000 for the restoration. The work then disappeared.

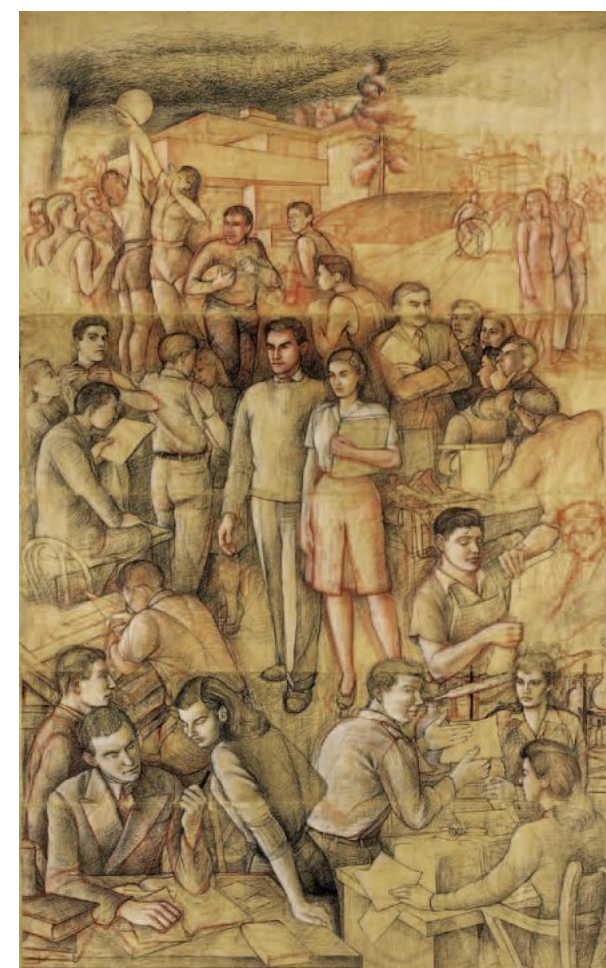
The panels may have been thrown out, but the imaginative and hopeful like to think they were stolen and tucked away in a cabin in the New Brunswick wilderness. Regardless of what really happened, they're gone.

This is why Fred Willar has to get up on the ottoman in Ross' studio, so the new murals can have the colour and light the way Ross remembers it.

"Well, it's embarrassing at times. Past sins, you know," Ross says about the recreation



Fred Ross' cartoons for 'The Destruction of War,' left, and 'Rebuilding the World Through Education,' 1947, charcoal, white and sanguine chalk on kraft paper, purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 2003. PHOTOS: NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA



project. "But this was the thing that made me interested in it – how many people have the chance to do it all over again?"

"In my case, through no circumstances I arranged, I got a chance to do it all over again 60 years later. That's a remarkable situation. The whole thing is remarkable. It's remarkable there's interest and concern about work I did that long ago. If I was in the real world I would have been put out to pasture 20 years ago, but here I am, working with the younger people."

"That's one of the wonderful things about the human spirit – we love to be challenged. We love to defy. They say 'You're too old' – which I am. They say 'You should be in a wheelchair' – which I am. They say 'You should be in nursing home' – which I am. But the thing that keeps people going is the creative urge."

The recreation project would not be possible without an accidental discovery in the spring of 1992 on Ross' 65th birthday.

Tom Smart, then curator of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, was at the New Brunswick Museum on Douglas Avenue in Saint John with Ross. They were looking at his paintings and drawings in the museum's vaults for an exhibition Smart was organizing for the Beaverbrook – *The Art of Fred Ross: A Timeless Humanism*.

The museum's registrar at the time, asked Ross to help identify some drawings she had discovered rolled up in a storage room. When the drawings were partially unrolled, Ross started to shake – here were the FHS mural cartoons, as well as drawings for his first mural *Annual School Picnic*

(1946) and *City Slums* (1950) mural.

Ross loaned the museum the drawings for a show in the '50s and forgot to retrieve them. It was unbelievable – while the actual murals were lost, somehow his kraft paper cartoons survived.

"I was also excited to have found them," writes Smart via email, "even though they threw an entirely different complexion on the exhibition I was organizing. Over the next year we worked to have them restored and mounted in a condition to show them at the Beaverbrook opening in the fall of 1993."

This landmark exhibition caught the attention of the National Gallery of Canada, and eventually led to the gallery purchasing the massive FHS mural cartoons.

Charles Hill, curator of Canadian art for the National Gallery of Canada, says the surviving drawings are a landmark in Canadian art. He's never heard of a recreation project like the one UNB is undertaking.

"In a world recovering from the misery of the Depression and horrors of the Second World War, Fred Ross' murals for the Fredericton High School offered a ray of hope and a guide for a future world," Hill writes.

"Ross' interest in mural painting was shared by a number of other Canadian artists yet few such ambitions were realized and even fewer have survived. The full-scale drawings for the Fredericton High School murals in the National Gallery of Canada, the only such drawings by a Canadian artist in the collections, reveal the full complexity and ambition of this major project."

The idea to recreate the mural came from Fredericton painter, and longtime Ross family friend, William Forrestall in 2010. He was walking by the framed black and white photographs of the murals in Fredericton High School while on his way to a Parent Support Committee meeting when the idea struck him.

He knew the full-size cartoons for the original mural were rediscovered and saved, and thought, with Ross' supervision, the mural could be duplicated. The idea met with favour at the meeting.

So, in April of last year, during the opening of their shared exhibition, *Two*

IT'S A HISTORICAL RECORD; IT'S A MEMORIAL; IT'S A GREAT ART TREASURE – ONE THAT WAS LOST AND HAS BEEN RE-FOUND."

WILLIAM FORRESTALL

Canadian Families: Ross & Forrestall at Peter Buckland Gallery in Saint John, Forrestall broached the idea with Ross. When Ross gave the OK, Forrestall dove into the project.

"Fred and Sheila Ross gave me my first exhibition at the Ring Gallery of Art, and I've always felt, like, how can I thank them, you know?" Forrestall says. "Also, it's just a really neat idea. This is like a lost treasure. A hundred years from now I don't think there's going to be much concern that this is the second mural."

"It's a historical record; it's a

memorial; it's a great art treasure – one that was lost and has been re-found."

Of course, the logistics of such a large undertaking where labyrinthine. Working with Ross and his daughter Cathy, Forrestall began planning the details. Instead of the finicky milk-derived casein paint of the original, they would use acrylics. They would again construct the painting on Masonite panels. The process simmered over the summer with meetings and a whole series of phone calls.

Meanwhile, Forrestall scoured for funding. There wasn't strong interest from the school board, so Forrestall contacted the

Fred Willar was available. Willar was a student at the Saint John Vocational School when Ross taught there in the '50s who, like Ross, painted a mural in the school when still a student.

Forrestall found two emerging Saint John artists for the other two spots on the team – Amy Ash and Sara Griffin. With large-scale mural painting experience in Nova Scotia, Griffin – originally from Grand Manan – was hired as studio manager.

The team was presented with two problems right off the bat – no colour photos of the murals exist and their 10-foot-wide panels of Masonite, which had to come from Quebec, were a flimsy three millimetres thick. While Fabine, a Fredericton company that specializes in making exhibition displays, designed supporting frames for the panels, the team made colour studies. Griffin visited Ross' murals at Harbour View High School as well.

Working from full-size sheets of Ross' cartoons, the team traced them onto the panels. From the tracing and the many character study photographs of Fred Willar's son recreating poses from the cartoons, as well as a whole binder of found imagery, the team set to work on the murals.

To paint the murals, the team paints over each other's work to blend their individual styles. When they're not sure what Ross' intention was in a particular spot they brainstorm until they find their answer.

They didn't get to drawing on the panels until mid-February, so the original deadline of May 20 was pushed back to June.

"It's nice to see a treasure revived," Forrestall says, "and, really, in 100 years people will say 'Wow, this is amazing work! It enriches New Brunswick and all of Canada.'"

On May 12, Ross visited the Saint John Arts Centre studio where the murals are being repainted. It was his 84th birthday and Susan Montague from UNB, Kathryn McCarroll from the Sheila Hugh Mackay Foundation and Freeman Patterson were there with carrot cake and champagne.

Amid the celebration, Ross forgot to compliment the team on their crumbling brick in the war mural. By the end of the week he made sure they knew he was pleased.

Ross may call them his "dream team" now, but things haven't always been amicable. For the first few weeks, he was rife with criticism. He insisted they fully complete one panel, rather than working in pieces. Things have smoothed out, but he is still concerned about imparting a unity in the work.

Ross remembers how difficult the mural was to complete in the first place. He didn't start to believe the project was actually possible until recently.

"I was inexperienced (in 1946), so I didn't have enough sense to be afraid. Now (the project) scares me silly. I wouldn't dream of starting from scratch again," he says.

Ross had ideas for who should be put in charge of painting the new mural, but only



Ross' murals installed in the Fredericton High School assembly hall.



PHOTO: JAMES WILSON

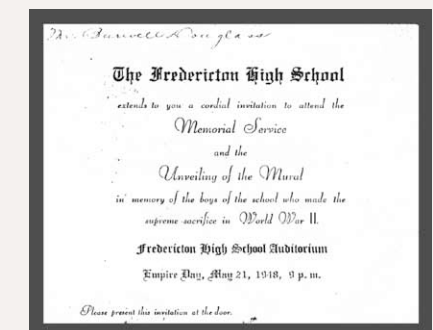


Ross working on 'The Destruction of War' in 1947 with a small study drawing and cartoon photos in the foreground.

salonfocus

timeline

May 21, 1948: Ross' murals are unveiled at FHS. Student Ralph Hay said in a speech that day, "We wanted a memorial that could become part of the school. We desired a memorial that would be in effect an everlasting memory to the graduates of FHS ... We wanted to pay tribute to those boys who through their gallant deeds have maintained the freedom and generosity of man which is Canada's glorious heritage."



to those boys who through their gallant deeds have maintained the freedom and generosity of man which is Canada's glorious heritage."

1957: Ross' murals are removed from Fredericton High School during renovations and put into storage.

1967: Ross' murals are discovered in the flooring of the FHS bookstore. Heavily damaged, they are put again into storage.

1976: Ross is brought to Fredericton to discuss restoration of his mural. The school debates the \$5,000 cost, but never commits to the restoration.

1984: A planned retrospective exhibition of Ross' work at UNB Art Centre inquires about including the FHS murals. The panels are discovered to be missing and are never found.



National Gallery of Canada buys N.B. artist's drawings
ARTS: Fred Ross grateful to have the gallery interested in his work.

CHARLIE HILL, National Gallery of Canada curator, says the drawings are a "great work of art" and that the gallery is "very interested in his work". The drawings are a "great work of art" and that the gallery is "very interested in his work". The drawings are a "great work of art" and that the gallery is "very interested in his work".

May 12, 1992: Tom Smart and Ross rediscover the long-lost original cartoons for the FHS murals.

2003: The National Gallery of Canada buys Ross' kraft paper cartoons for his FHS murals.



March 31, 2011: Ross signs the wall at the Currie Center, UNB Fredericton, where his reanimated FHS murals will be unveiled on June 27.

"This was freedom. This meant so much."

ROSS ← S5

"I did not have the experience to tackle a project like this. I shouldn't have done it. If I was really clearly thinking I would have said 'Thanks guys, but count me out.'"

But in the spring of 1946, there was nothing young Ross couldn't accomplish. He had completed *Annual School Picnic* as a student at Saint John Vocational School and was profiled in the nationally circulated *Montreal Standard* under the headline "Freddie Ross, untrained 18-year-old."

Coming from a working class family in the lower economic bracket, "at the time \$700 seemed like paradise. Just after the Depression it was unbelievable," Ross says.

Ross drew on a wealth of inspiration for the murals – in particular the work of Mexico's Diego Rivera and America's Symeon Shimin. Compositional elements from Ross' murals are in many Rivera works, and Shimin's *Contemporary Justice* and *the Child* mural was similarly composed using destruction and construction.

Ross saw Shimin's work firsthand in 1946 while staying in Pegi Nicol MacLeod's New York City apartment. Ted Campbell encouraged Ross to look up Shimin while in New York, and it was at his studio where Ross saw the full-scale study for Shimin's mural. He was so struck, he travelled to Washington to see the mural in person but was unable to see it.

"To me, you celebrate this," Leroux says. "It doesn't cheapen it. He didn't steal an idea. You take something and it inspires you to do your own version. You base it on greatness. You know it works, and you do another version of it."

Boiling things down to "the simplest idea" – the horrors of war and the benefits of peace – Ross made his early sketches. From the beginning Ross had the murals linked by an atomic mushroom cloud.

"The atomic bomb was a very important part of our life at that time. You don't realize it now, but it affected our basic thinking – 'Why do anything when it's going to

be blown to bits?'" Ross remembers.

After his sketches, Ross had his friends and colleagues pose for studies for the education side and collected "a morgue" of images from books and magazines and movies for the war side. He based the Modernist home in the peace panel on Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece *Fallingwater*.

Ross' spent the bulk of his time on the project composing the full-size cartoons. He thought through the project with his pencil.

"The ideas come first, and maybe the painting comes last. If the ideas are not sound and don't make sense, the painting won't either. ... The accomplishment here was arranging 50 or 60 figures in a plan that allowed them to exist and not be a jumble."

The finished drawings are remarkable for their intentional lack of overt religious elements and gruesome horror. Ross says he didn't want to exaggerate. He wanted you to feel religion, not see it.

"There's no John Wayne coming to save the day. ... I did not use any idealization. These boys and girls are just like my fellow students, because that's who they were and that's who I was. I wasn't a phony. I was doing just what I knew."

Pointing to a distraught woman a baby in *The Destruction of War* cartoon, Ross says, "See this mother and child? It's all there. You don't need to 'gild the lily.' If you're good at it, you can get it across by more subtle means."

Ross did his cartoons at Ted Campbell's studio, and worked on the painting at his family home on Mecklenburg Street. Ross is vague on the details about how he did this, except that he couldn't work at more than two panels at once.

"There are no problems, only solutions. When I did this blasted thing I was 19 years old and I was 20 when I finished it. I had all kinds of problems, but I never talk about them because most problems you face as the world rolls along. You don't have time to prepare for them. You don't

have time to wring your hands."

And always at the forefront of Ross' mind was the sacrifice of the young men his memorial was for.

"This wasn't just a six-month contract for Fred," Leroux says. "This was life and death. This was our world. This was freedom. This meant so much."

So, Ross naturally questioned the haste of the recreation process. Leroux had to visit his friend to reassure him.

"I said 'Look, Fred. Do you trust me? Do you trust that I won't let anything happen that would compromise the murals? Then we have to let the process happen. ... If it doesn't work out I will be the first one to make sure it gets changed.'"

With his faith in Leroux, Ross relaxed and his confidence in the project grew. Besides, he was not one to get in the way of progress and the memories of those dead soldiers still had to be honoured.

Leroux had to defend including the list of Second World War victims in the new murals. There was some debate as to whether it was necessary.

Including those names was critical for Leroux. It's because of them that he even knew about the murals in the first place.

For more than 50 years, an invitation to the 1948 unveiling was just another piece of coffee table clutter at Leroux's family cottage in Bouctouche until his mother mentioned its significance.

The invite was addressed to Leroux's great-grandfather, Burwell Douglass, to honour his son Charlie K. Douglass – an FHS alum whose name was on Ross' mural and who was Leroux's grandmother's brother. Charlie was a tail gun-

FEW SUCH AMBITIONS WERE REALIZED ... EVEN FEWER HAVE SURVIVED.

CHARLIE HILL, NATIONAL GALLERY CURATOR

ner who was shot down over Myanmar. The last time Leroux's grandmother saw him was when he was waiting for the bus to take him off to war and she was on her way to the hospital to give birth to Leroux's mother. By the time the murals were unveiled, Charlie's body had still yet to be found.

"The murals humanize the reality of war," Leroux says. "It wasn't just about a carved white marble angel looking over a young man – all dignity and sacrifice. ... This is about the human aspect of war. It's not romanticizing anything."

More astounding than Leroux's own story is that of Harold J.R. Grover. In the documentation from the 1948 unveiling, there are 62 names listed among the FHS war dead. Again, in the photos of the murals installed at FHS there are visibly 62 names between the two murals.

watches over it all. He sees Fred Willar look back and forth from his palette to a panel, his hands on his hips, before hesitantly dipping his brush and finally adding one small stroke of white rubber for a boy's sneaker. He watches Sara Griffin's legs dangle from the scaffolding she's sitting on while working with broad strokes on a wasteland of war. He listens as Amy Ash debates an ear with Willar.

The photograph stands in for Ross who can only make it to the studio every couple of weeks. But that doesn't mean he isn't participating – this project has enveloped and invigorated the artist more than anyone expected.

"I can't think of anything better," Ross says, "than having fresh, young open minds with talent to work with."

He sees himself in the young artists. "That's the key to whatever one does.



The recreation project's 'dream team' - studio manager Sara Griffin, left, and studio assistants Amy Ash and Fred Willar - with two completed panels from the new 'Rebuilding the World Through Education.' PHOTO: JAMES WILSON

Just as a doctor wants their child to grow up to be a doctor, it's certainly the same in the arts. ... We're a product of the times, city, poverty and opportunities. We're all the same."

Ross is glad the team is working from the drawings to reconstruct the murals. Although they're not as clear in some spots as the finished mural, he says "that's the real me."

"If I did this today it wouldn't be the same drawing. ... I've had 60 years of experience in the meantime. It would be impossible."

"But the assignment was to recreate the mural as close as possible to the original for future generations, and the idea about the atom bomb is just as vital today. It doesn't get the same attention, but it's just the same – we're on razor's edge. Nothing has changed."

This is the heart of the mural – "man's inhumanity to man, and hope for the world." By linking both hope and destruction with an atomic blast – looming in the background as in some distant future – and using the same students for both sides of the panel, Ross warns both peaceful and wartime ambition can lead to destruction equally.

In just the five months of the project, the world has faced the threat of nuclear meltdown in Japan and war in Libya among other crises. Ross and the team working on the murals can't help but wonder how far we've come.

One only has to look at Ross' FHS murals to see how destructive prosperity can be. This is why Ross isn't incensed by the treatment of his original murals. He keeps his outlook in sharp perspective.

"I'm a realist, for starters. I understand art and the history of art. Greater works than mine have been lost and destroyed. This isn't anything unique – indifference and lack of knowledge, all of these are the greatest enemy art has."

Building on the Mexican and American traditions of social murals, Ross wanted to get his ideas out into the world. It was up to us to decide what to do with them. In just 50 years, we chose to forget them.

On June 27, Ross' murals will again be unveiled as a memorial and warning for future generations. Only time will tell whether we listen or let Ross' ideas fade away once again.

"This is what I did in my small way in a small town on the edge of nowhere, and that's the challenge and fascination of it. It's just like if you're writing a novel and you say you want it to express the fears and hopes of your generation – for people to read it and go 'My God, that's just what it was like.'"

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Fred Ross circa 1950.