

Explore Winnipeg's murals from home

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NORTHWEST WINNIPEG

Winnipeg is home to more than 600 outdoor murals, which is an intimidating number for art-admirers who aspire to see them all.

With social distancing and isolation becoming the new norm during the COVID-19 pandemic, embarking on a mural tour may be one of the best ways to learn more about Winnipeg's art scene, in a safe and active way.

While institutions like the Winnipeg Art Gallery have closed indefinitely to help prevent the spread of the virus, The Murals of Winnipeg website — launched by Bob Buchanan, his wife Louise, and his friend Bob Bruce, in 2003 — allows Winnipeggers to engage the city's murals, both online and offline.

"I'm one of these people that believes that you can enhance the quality of life through art," Buchanan, a 67-year-old Glenwood resident, said.

"It doesn't cost you anything to go to this gallery."

The website's map and photo gallery provide details for all murals such as location, artist, year of creation, as well as the story behind the mural for roughly half of the 600 pieces. There is also a 'Rest in Peace' section for murals that no longer exist.

Users can enjoy a virtual mural tour from the comfort of their home using the website's resources, or they can utilize the information to plan their own offline excursion.

According to health officials, going outside during the pandemic is still safe as long as people maintain a distance of six feet from each other and exercise caution.

Buchanan encourages Winnipeggers to take this opportunity to learn more about the city's murals. With hundreds of pieces to see,

it may be hard to establish a starting point. So, he has five recommendations to kick off the tour.

A Charlie Johnston fan, Buchanan highlighted four pieces by the Winnipeg mural artist: *FitzGerald Field Notes* (677 Portage Ave.), *PhotoFinish* (831 Portage Ave.), which was created with Tom Andrich; Johnston's rendering of Canada Auto (1688 St. Matthews Ave.); and *Welcome to Downtown* (678 Main St.), a collaborative effort by Johnston, Mandy van Leeuwen, and Jennifer Johnson. Buchanan also suggested Jill Sellers' mural at 714 St. Mary's Rd.

Not only does The Murals of Winnipeg shed light on the city's talented artists, Buchanan said, but it acts as an historical archive for artwork that has changed or disappeared from Winnipeg's walls over time.

"It's the only remaining record of them," he said.

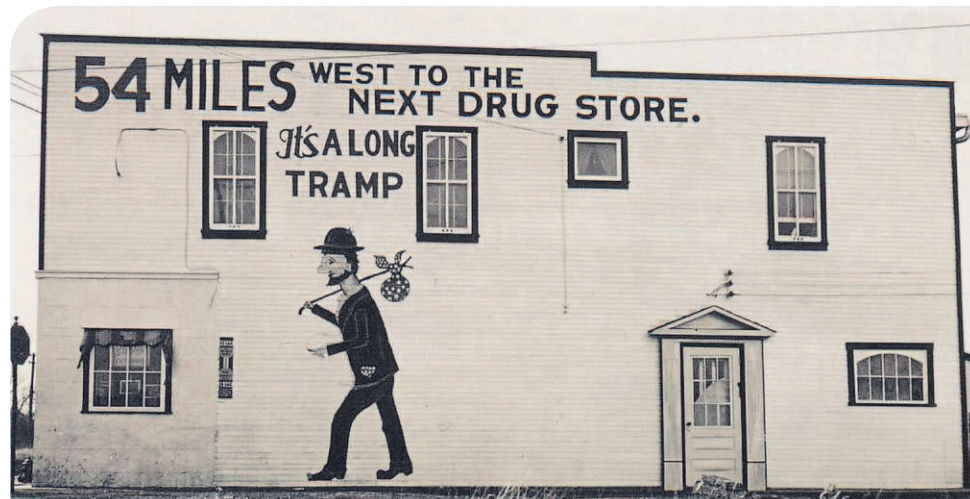
Winnipeg's oldest known mural, for instance — the Long Tramp, by original artist Leslie Charles Smith, painted on the side of a former drug store located at 2579 Portage Ave. — dates back to the 1930s, and has been refurbished multiple times since.

Through in-depth research and several interviews, Buchanan began to discover quirks about the mural.

"When I scanned (the photo) and blew it up I noticed details that no one could recall," he said. "The front-forward foot... the sock is sticking out of the hole in the shoe. Between the tramp and the window, you'll see a black strip; if you blow it up, it's an ad for Ex-Lax," Buchanan laughed.

Annually, The Murals of Winnipeg group holds a Mural of the Year competition to crown the city's top painting. Only murals painted that year qualify. Buchanan expects to have judging underway in May to decide 2019's winner.

To learn more about Winnipeg's murals,



Supplied photo

The earliest known photo of the Long Tramp, circa 1941, which is presumed to be Winnipeg's oldest mural.



Supplied photo

The Long Tramp mural in its most recent state.

visit the website at themuralsofwinnipeg.com

"Regardless of how much you know or you don't know," Buchanan said, "we can

all have our own appreciation and response which are relevant and valid for you. I love that about art."

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