

Washington People

Athletes become coaches, beat reporters make editor, code-writing computer programmers are suddenly dot.com CEOs. And at the School of Art, a studio painter with an enthusiasm for restoring old buildings has become a leading figure in a broad range of civic projects.

W. Patrick Schuchard, the E. Desmond Lee Professor for Community Collaboration in the School of Art, began — and continues — his career as a painter, but today juggles projects ranging from public murals to city planning to architectural redevelopment.

At the center of this activity is Schuchard's profound belief in the power of art to impact and improve the quality of our common life.

"Painting is a very specific craft that all too often operates in a narrow slice of the academic and art world," said Schuchard, who is not known for pulling punches. "But as a concept and a theoretical system, painting can serve as a



W. Patrick Schuchard completed this mural for Carmine's Steakhouse downtown, his third collaboration with Chicago architect Charles Kerr. Schuchard and Kerr also have worked together on projects for the Missouri Athletic Club's Jack Buck Grill and Truffles Restaurant in Ladue.

From the studio's solitude to city streets

Patrick Schuchard believes in power of art to transform our common life

BY LIAM OTTEN

kind of matrix that is applicable to almost anything. Nowhere else in the culture can you talk about the way one's own sensibility and creativity collide with problem solving, history and contemporary thought."

By way of example, Schuchard points to the current redevelopment of St. Louis' "East Loop" neighborhood, the section of Delmar Boulevard between Skinker and DeBaliviere boulevards, for which he is a consultant.

"As a formal construct, Delmar Boulevard is six lanes wide, a major artery, a Mason/Dixon line between white and black, north and south," he explained. "It is not made to be crossed. The nature of that form, the speeds that cars fly down that street, you take your life in your hands. There's no shade; the pavement gets up to 120 degrees in the summer. It's the most inhospitable place in the world.

Breaking up barriers

"What all this tells people, visually and formally, is 'You don't cross this.' So the redesign has to do with findings ways of breaking up and bisecting that barrier — with crosswalks, plantings and medians, with broader sidewalks and narrower traffic lanes — so that it becomes easier for people to navigate. Now to me, this is still a formal, visual problem, but one with ramifications beyond just 'beautification.'"

Jeff Pike, dean of the School of Art, is enthusiastic about Schuchard's work. "Some of the most exciting visual things happening today are occurring at the intersection between art and business, creativity and capital," Pike said. "I think that Pat really shows how an artist can create work that is not only visually satisfying, but also engages an audience and has real impact on a community."

Born in 1951, Schuchard grew up in St. Louis and earned a bachelor's degree from the University's School of Art in 1973. He studied for a year at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art and, in 1975, earned a master's degree from the University of South Florida—Tampa. He taught for two years at the University of Delaware but returned to St. Louis in 1977, taking a job with Fortune, a custom furniture-making and construction company. In 1980 he built a home for his family in Webster Groves and soon afterward began buying and restoring properties around St. Louis.

Schuchard continued to teach throughout this period, both at local colleges and at the School of Architecture here. In his own work a decided shift was taking place, moving away from abstraction to still life and portraiture. He also began to create highly realistic sculpture — a life-size wax piano, a series of wax-on-felt album covers, an eight-foot study of "Alton Giant" Robert Wadlo.

At the same time, Schuchard was growing disaffected with the traditional gallery system ("high-end consignment shops," he calls them) and began searching for new artistic outlets. In 1989, he co-founded "The Blue Moon Gallery," an alternative exhibition space in the Washington Avenue loft district, where he initiated a well-attended series of "Town Meetings for the Arts," which continue to this day. He also began to take on large-scale public art projects, drawing on his experience in construction and renovation. In 1987 he executed a 6,000-square-foot *trompe l'oeil* architectural mural for the Lashley & Baer Building in downtown St. Louis and, the following year, created an even larger work at 705 Olive St.

"I didn't know the first thing about working on that scale," Schuchard admitted. "But those projects combined all the things I liked to do — designing an image, working with construction guys, building scaffolding and meeting other logistical challenges. It was a good healthy mix of public and private." Other commissions soon followed: a 4,000-square-foot mural for Arkansas' Hot Springs National Park; three projects, ranging from 4,500 to 6,000 square feet, in Owensboro, Ky.; a 7,000-square-foot cast concrete mural for the University of Texas, San Antonio — more than a dozen public projects in the last decade alone.

By the mid-1990s Schuchard had become a sought-after consultant for variety of public art and redevelopment projects, including Arts in Transit's MetroLink sculpture program and renovations for the St. Louis Public Library. Today he sits on the boards of a half-dozen local arts groups, including the Forum for Contemporary Art, the

St. Louis Gallery Association, the Clayton Public Art Commission, Arts in Transit and the 2004 Cultural Task Force.

Earlier this year Schuchard presided over the opening of University Lofts, a \$5.6 million downtown redevelopment providing affordable living/working space for artists. Located at 1627 Washington Ave., the eight-story, 64,000-square-foot turn-of-the-century warehouse structure is now home to 26 one- and two-bedroom units (all leased), the art school's Des Lee Gallery and a first-floor restaurant.

W. Patrick Schuchard

Born and raised in St. Louis

Education Washington University, B.F.A., 1973; University of South Florida—Tampa, M.F.A., 1975

University position The E. Desmond Lee Professor for Community Collaboration

Family Son, Alex, 25, a painter in New York; daughter, Anne, 21, a senior in fashion design at the School of Art

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JEFF PIKE

Schuchard conceived University Lofts as a way to help young artists stay and begin their careers in St. Louis after graduation. He presented the idea to Richard Roloff, executive vice chancellor of the University, who in turn took it to St. Louis' Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance (RCHDA), a local organization with expertise in complex real estate developments. RCHDA refined the concept, packaged the development and took it to Bank of America.

"It's not as if there are two classes of people in this culture, a tiny 'art' elite and the rest of the masses," Schuchard said. "There are all kinds of interesting, unusual people — doctors, attorneys, workers, business people — who are smart and curious and hungry for meaning in their lives. I think that artists can find ways of working with these people and ways of helping

them to exceed their own expectations."

Other recent projects include a pair of murals for two new St. Louis restaurants — Carmine's Steak House downtown and Truffles in Ladue. At the same time, Schuchard worked with William H. Gass, Ph.D., the David May Distinguished University Professor Emeritus in the Humanities in Arts & Sciences, on a series of paintings to illustrate Gass' essay "The Moyles & Moyles of It," published this spring in the book "Three Essays: Reflections on the American Century."

This past summer, Schuchard returned to Owensboro, Ky., for another large-scale project, a 6,000-square-foot *trompe l'oeil* mural in Brescia University's quadrangle, which he completed with the help of his son Alex (B.F.A. '98) and several other art school alumni. The group also created a series of banners for the University and for a local school district, and Schuchard — at the behest of real estate developer Malcolm Bryant — began advising Brescia on its long-range campus planning. (Schuchard also serves as a consultant for a new 20-acre medical campus Bryant is developing.)

"I look over proposals, make comments and suggestions or just say it looks great or ask 'How much are they charging you for this monstrosity?' Schuchard explained, joking. "And if it seems like they're being charged too much for something, I might figure out a way to do it better by doing less."

"I have this sort of hybrid, self-designed job," he continued. "I know something about architecture and city planning but I don't really want to be an architect or a city planner. I like being a painter, but most of what I do in the studio is very lonesome — coffee and FM radio. So I like being able to have these other conversations, articulating ideas and learning what people think about things."

"More and more I see every work of art as a site-specific piece," Schuchard concluded. "It's all about knowing your audience, like figuring out what kind of conversation to have with your grandmother and what to talk about with your uncle."



Schuchard's 9-foot "World's Tallest Man," 1990-91, a portrait of Robert Wadlo, also known as the "Alton Giant," is one of a series of life-like sculptures the artist crafted from felt and wax.