

SODO Business Improvement Area

INNOVATION

In 2018, SODO Track mural corridor became the longest in the world for street art. The collective public, private and non profit partnership was an incredible project full of innovation focusing on the theme of "Motion, Speed and Progress." The project is seen everyday by more than 50K commuters and visitors and is a great entrance and exit from Seattle's downtown. It takes a new look at public art from public transportation.

OUTCOME

A story of physical transformation, the SODO Track is also a story about partnership. Produced by 4Culture, the project is coalition-built with multiple agency partners and community supporters. We come together around shared goals – enhance the transit experience, up the ante on street art in Seattle, contribute something new to the global street art conversation – and maximize public investment with economies of scale, grants, private donations, and in-kind contributions from many, including local chefs.

EXECUTION

The concept for the project has been floating around for nearly 25 years — ever since the SODO Business Association partnered with Urban Artworks to paint murals in hopes of reducing trash and graffiti in the area. Those original murals had long since been tagged and painted over, but the idea persisted.

The first step was partnering with SODO BIA (Business Improvement Area, distinct from the earlier group) to get buy-in from the private businesses whose building's backsides would be used as the canvas.

With King County Metro Transit and Sound Transit on board as partners, in 2016 twelve artists produced nine murals. Then more and more murals were added each summer until 2018 completed the track.

REPRESENTATION

Artists are invited by curator Gage Hamilton and selected from the 4Culture Muralist Roster, a peer panel-selected roster of regional artists who self-submitted for consideration. These artists bring a broad range of backgrounds, styles, and approaches to the theme of motion – from painted animation frames that come to life in transit to patterns that evoke Native American dance movements, from creatures that leap to vanishing points that point to places beyond what we can see. Artists are invited to participate festival-style and to work in new ways: some paint at their largest scale to date, others offer youth workshops or collaborate as teams for the first time.

REPLICATION

We were incredibly fortunate to have these two miles of blank walls on this corridor ready for murals. While many areas may not have the space, it is obvious that investment into murals and art in downtowns adds so much. Not all projects have to be to this scale, but the idea of a summer art festival that brings together different perspectives around a shared goal is something that any one could dream up. Thinking on small scale could be around signal box murals, a small alley, or light polls. The result may be different, but the process of bringing together people for a shared goal is incredibly replicable regardless of size.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The main challenge and concern for property owners and project leads was around maintenance. What would happen to these murals if they were tagged or destroyed? To solve this problem a maintenance plan was developed including a maintenance fund. Working with a non profit, Urban Artworks, we were able to set up a contract for both touch ups as well as monitoring. Also, many of the murals used the black line strategy having a 10ft black painted area that would be easier to paint out and most likely area to see graffiti.