

Landscape painter Daniel Hauben at work in his Riverdale studio on murals for BCC.



PHOTO BY PROF. DAVID KOENIGSTEIN, BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE, LIBRARY/RC DEPT.

‘Glorious Panoramas’ of an Unsung Borough

An award-winning local artist is creating monumental urban landscapes for the new Bronx Community College complex.

FOR MORE than a quarter of a century award-winning landscape painter Daniel Hauben has set up his easel under elevated subway trains, at street corners and on overpasses, capturing the life of the Bronx on canvas and paper.

In the last two years, however, Hauben, 55, has stayed inside, working in his Riverdale studio to create monumental art pieces for the new, \$102-million, three-story North Hall and Library complex at Bronx Community College.

Twenty-two paintings that BCC associate professor of art Mary Jo Mazzella Ben-Nun described as “glorious panoramas of the Bronx” will be unveiled when the 98,600-square-foot building developed by New York architect Robert A.M. Stern, is dedicated in the fall.

Working in oil on two 10-by-5-foot and 20 5-by-1½-foot canvases, Hauben painted brilliant scenes from across the borough.

There are depictions of campus life with students reading or walking; a vendor selling mangoes under an elevated train station; scenes from buildings and subway train elevators; and views of the Harlem, Hudson and East River bridges, the Bronx River Parkway, Yankee Stadium and the Burnside subway station with its platform between the uptown and downtown tracks.

“I tried to include a real range of our urban landscape,” Hauben says.

The two major panels will be hung on landings in the library’s stairwell and the

smaller pieces along a balcony overlooking the main reading room.

“I think of them as glorious panoramas of the Bronx,” says Ben-Nun, who is also director of the Hall of Fame Art Gallery at the college. She saw the paintings in Hauben’s studio.

“I think they bring out the heart, the positive historic and vital essence of the Bronx,” Ben-Nun says. “He’s not the first but the first in a long time to really highlight the beauty of this sometimes maligned borough. He really shows the vitality and the color and the excitement of the borough. The Bronx gets a bad rap, but it’s really a terrific place, very vital and thriving.”

In addition to the library — formerly housed in a basement — the new building will contain classrooms, offices for faculty, administration and staff, and a café. With an enrollment of 11,500 and “the digital age upon us, we needed to expand,” says Ben-Nun.

Hauben won a \$219,000 state-sponsored commission to do the work for the library in a 2008 competition with 18 other contestants. David Taylor, Dean of administration and finance, headed an art committee that selected him as the finalist.

“The committee felt his work best identified with our population and best spoke to the Bronx as a community,” Taylor says. The paintings are bright and uplifting, he says, and “will be a tremendous uplift to the learning environment.”

Commenting on Hauben’s art for the library, another committee member, Ruth Bass, head of BCC’s Art and Music Department, says she was “taken by his

work right away. He takes things you and I might not think interesting and makes us look at how exciting the world is right around us.”

In his proposal for the commission, Hauben says he tried to “give a sense of location to the people who would see these paintings: the students, faculty and staff who study, teach and work in the school. My paintings are about the unique landscape of that part

of the Bronx, to give people a better sense of where they are.”

Born and raised in the Bronx, Hauben has focused much of his work on the borough’s urban landscape. “I consider myself a landscape painter, and the landscape I’m most familiar with is the Bronx,” he says. “I think it’s rich with potential for being a reflection of how the world is changing.”

Hauben knew early that art was his calling. He remembers painting his first “cityscape” on his bedroom wall when he

was 8. He attended Music and Art High School (now LaGuardia High School) for a year and dropped out.

He earned a GED diploma, attended The School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the School of Visual Arts in New York, paying his way there with scholarships, work study, and loans.

In 1988, Hauben had a solo show at Bronx Museum of the Arts. His paintings are in collections at the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Historical Society, the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress. In March he received the Poe Award for Literary and Artistic Excellence from the Bronx Historical Society. He travels and paints around the United States and in countries worldwide.

For the past eight years, as an adjunct instructor, Hauben has taught a four-hour class in drawing in the architecture program at City College. He also taught drawing at the CUNY Graduate Center when it first opened.

“It’s been a very positive experience for me,” he says. “They let me teach what I have a strong feeling for. So I greatly appreciate having gotten this commission from CUNY and the State. They let me do my thing. Between the teaching and the commission CUNY has played a big role in my life the last couple of years.”

Visitors to his website: www.danielhauben.com can get a peek at some of the panels that will be displayed in the library.

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