

The RIVERDALE PRESS

turns 100 years old

The Champs Elysees of the Bronx, The Grand Concourse

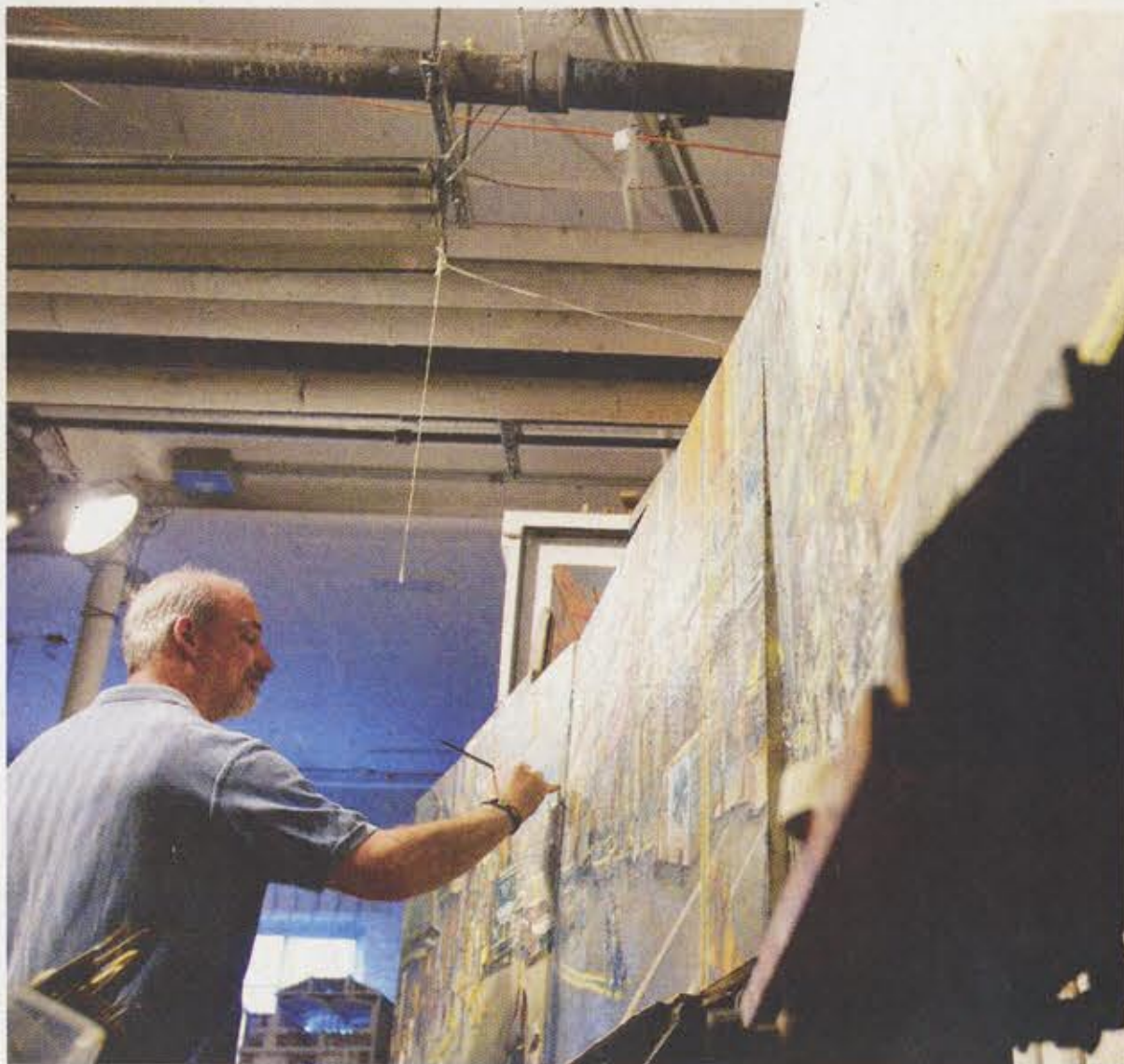
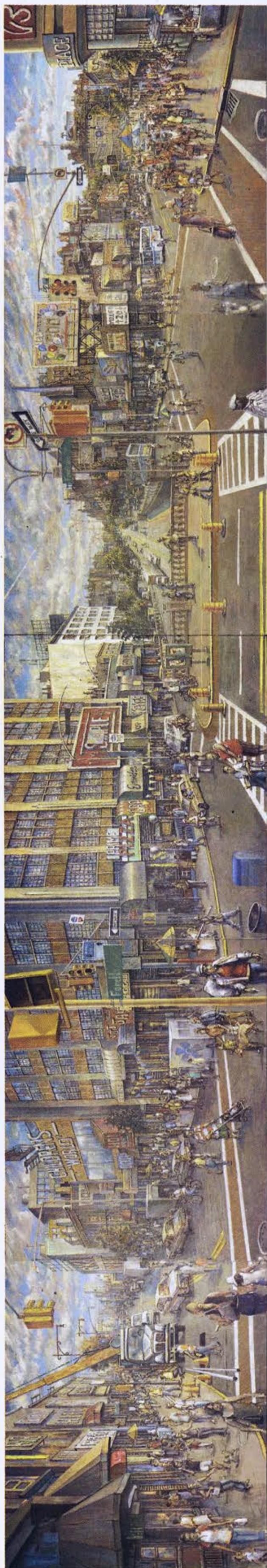


Photo by Claudio Papapietro

DANIEL HAUBEN, who lives and works in the Riverdale/Kingsbridge area, has created a painting that nearly matches the scale of its subject, the Grand Concourse. It spreads across five panels.

A close look at the once and future grandeur of a boulevard of dreams

By Jason Fields
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Five panels tell a story of a fabled thoroughfare in the Bronx. But the story being told is no fairytale. The Grand Concourse, a wide boulevard like no other in the city, turns 100 this year, and it shows.

The boulevard is now an endless stretch of dollar stores and dwellings almost uniformly in a state of less-than-genteel decay. But there is still a tangible vibrancy to the place.

Tomorrow's opening of an exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts is the beginning of a year-long look at the universe of the Concourse, past, present and future.

Daniel Hauben, a well-regarded painter of urban landscapes, who lives and works in Riverdale, is a major contributor to the exhibition. His 16-foot painting, "Bronx Vortex," is a window onto the Concourse as it is now.

"When I painted this painting, my emphasis was [on the Concourse] still being a crossroad and a juncture. Part of the challenge is to capture a sense of motion and to give it a feeling of movement, of change," Mr. Hauben, 52, said.

The artist grew up in the Bronx, but a trip to the Grand Concourse was a serious expedition from his childhood home in the far northeast corner of the borough.

He remembers being dragged to big department stores like Alexander's. He wasn't much interested in shopping, and often wished he was somewhere else, but even under those circumstances, Mr. Hauben felt the energy around him.

"It came to symbolize for me the epicenter of the Bronx," Mr. Hauben said.

And he was compelled to paint it. He set up his easel near Fordham Road and began to try to bring what he saw in front of him to eternal life.

It wasn't possible to capture everything he saw on a single canvas, and even two canvases were just a start. The world Mr. Hauben creates is intricate and detailed, with clear definition and the blur of motion displayed in the same figure.

And his timing couldn't have possibly been better.



Photo courtesy of the artist.

THE ARTIST is shown at work on the Grand Concourse.

What's next at the museum

The Bronx Museum will present several special events and programs in conjunction with this exhibition.

On Friday, March 6, from 6 to 10 p.m., there will be a special Grand Concourse open house to celebrate the launch of "Intersections," with guest speakers, a special reception and live musical performance by the San Juan Hill Band.

Noted architect Daniel Libeskind will be among the lineup of guests for a special symposium, which will be held on Saturday, March 7, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. This full-day event will feature historians, architects and urban plan-

ners, as well as offer great resources for teachers on how to incorporate the history of the Grand Concourse into their classroom curriculum.

Looking a few months down the road, the museum will hold an outdoor street fair, on Sunday, June 21, from noon to 5 p.m. The afternoon will be centered on various themes relating to the history of the Grand Concourse.

Admission to all of these events is free and open to the public, but registration is required to attend the symposium. For more information, call 718-681-6000 ext. 151 or go to www.bronxmuseum.org.

"I was completely unaware this was the centennial," Mr. Hauben said. But when he found out, he leapt on the opportunity.

Mr. Hauben spoke with the chief curator for the exhibit, Sergio Bessa, and was thrilled with the enthusiastic response from the museum.

Mr. Bessa is delighted to have the 16-foot work.

"It's a fantastic painting," he said.

The museum has been working on this centennial commemoration for four years, Mr. Bessa said. This first segment, "Intersections: The Grand Concourse at 100," features works by Diane Artbus, André Kertész, Adolph Gottlieb, as well as Mr. Hauben. It runs until Monday, July 20.