

[Mural Artist Paints Up the Town](#)[| Print |](#)User Rating:  / 4Poor Best

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By Jim Knowles*San Leandro Times*

You gotta keep the taggers from painting those walls.

But in downtown Hayward, they're paying a guy to paint the walls.

Andrew Kong Knight just finished off his third wall with his brush and sprayer. The Century Theatres and Downtown Hayward parking garage will never be the same.

Hayward hired Knight to create murals around the downtown movie theater. The streets before and after Knight's murals are like the difference between night and day.

"I grew up in South Hayward, and it was a big deal to take the bus into downtown Hayward when I was a kid," Knight says. "So I feel honored to do this. It's kind of a dream come true."

The mural facing C Street has "Hayward" on the marquee of an illuminated art deco theater ensconced in its hometown as beams and modern BART trains reach out to the world.

"I tried to make it glamorous and exciting," Knight said. "I've always loved art deco and I tried to incorporate that."

The marquee in the mural resembles the Paramount Theater in Oakland, and it turns out that's one of Knight's childhood memories. His music teacher would get students in to see the Oakland Symphony during rehearsals and Knight never forgot the grandeur of the Paramount.

Knight uses a combination of brush and spray painting. Creating the murals took over two years from the initial sketches to their finish last week. He had done another mural in Hayward, down Foothill near Centennial Hall, when he got the okay for this job around the movie theater.

The murals are funded with City of Hayward grants to improve the downtown. And buildings with murals tend to avoid graffiti – walls covered in art don't get tagged like bare walls.

The mural facing Foothill Boulevard features a "Hayward" sign in the hills resembling the famous "Hollywood" sign, as the East Bay city is framed in movie premiere spotlights, the city lights twinkling in the California night.

Then, as you're heading from the parking lot to the theater on the little side street, Knight created a mural that brings you inside. Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh hover onscreen in an embrace, and a glimpse of the first few rows of the audience appear in the semi-darkness of the theater.



The mural job came along at just the right time for Knight. He had just gotten laid off from teaching art at Hayward schools for the past 17 years.

Knight faced many obstacles doing the outdoor project but none were worse than the fall taken by his fiancée, Alani, who tumbled back in a chair off a scaffold and fractured her skull on the sidewalk.

“She’s lucky to be alive and continues to make a full recovery,” says Knight.

Knight couldn’t have finished the murals without going in for physical therapy himself. Doing such big murals is enough of a project indoors. But working on the scaffold while trying to paint in the sun and wind, while the paint dries fast, requires athletic as well as artistic skill.

“You have to have a lot of energy, have confidence and act right at that moment,” Knight says.

At the time Knight was working, his asthma was flaring up due to the thousands of cars on Foothill Boulevard just below him. The car fumes made it necessary to clean the painting as he worked, removing the grime.

Knight has other mural projects lined up – a middle school in Hayward, and painting AT&T circuit boxes along the streets of Hayward.

People would ask him what he was doing while he painted and he’s glad people are interested, because as Knight sees it, the murals are for the public.

“I tell people, ‘It’s for you,’” he says. “Once I’m done, it’s for everybody.”

CAPTION 1: Andrew Kong Knight puts the finishing touch on one of his murals at the movie theater in downtown Hayward in this photo taken by one of his art students, Tony Alvarez.

PHOTO BY TONY ALVAREZ

CAPTION 2 & 3: Knight painted an art deco image in mural facing C Street and a “Hollywood Meets Hayward” theme in the mural along Foothill Boulevard.

PHOTOS BY JIM KNOWLES

