

# ART and living

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## public art

# A Message for the Masses

Ed Massey's canvases are huge, but he gets a little help from some friends

by Lars Carlson

Along the western edge of Los Angeles' Century City skyline rises a unique tower of color and light. To the Angeleno stuck in traffic on Olympic Boulevard, this florally adorned beacon is a zesty addition to the cityscape, a breath of fresh air along an otherwise ordinary drive. Yet to visionary artist Ed Massey, the tower is a culmination of years of trials, tribulations, and one very grand idea.

Rewind to 1995. While on a run near this same stretch of road, a young Massey noticed an unsightly oil derrick marring what was for the most part a picturesque view. With a history of public art in his background, the provocative sculptor took note and, following a chance visit to a children's ward of a local hospital, saw an opportunity to rethink his role as a public artist.

"After visiting hospitals and seeing kids were painting and drawing...I found out the panels [of the derrick] were removable," Massey recounts. "Those panels were painted on the ground. Anyone can paint them. Here's a structure that is 170 feet in height, and there are kids that are in total isolation from the world. Why not bring the panels of the building to them?" he thought.

And with that, Massey spearheaded a massive undertaking—dubbed Project 9865—in which panels of the derrick were removed and sent to hospitals around California. Seriously ill and physically disabled children were able to paint the individual panels that, when brought together, would form the project's *Tower of Hope*.

"It was the first program of its kind in the world," says Massey, recalling the difficulties he had in getting many on board his Project 9865 train. "No one embraced us immediately. It was very grassroots. That was probably our most difficult installation ever."

Completed in 2000, the strikingly graceful floral patterns of the *Tower's* design provide a flagship icon for Portraits of Hope—a collaboration between Massey and his brother Bernie—devoted, as the company's mission statement declares, to "unifying families and communities through the arts."



Above: A young artist utilizes one of Portraits of Hope's telescope paintbrushes. For the program's specialized needs, Massey also devised a shoe paintbrush for those unable to paint with their arms and a fruit-flavored mouth brush for artists who are unable to paint with either their hands or their feet. Photo courtesy Portraits of Hope.



Left: While Portraits of Hope's projects feature children as their creators, Massey isn't afraid of throwing a brush (or in this case a mop) on the canvas himself. Photo courtesy Portraits of Hope.

