The Trompe L’oeil Murals of Great Neck Plaza
Phase 1: Maple Drive and Cutter Mill Road

William M. Cochran, 2004
Introduction

The integration of a series of fine art trompe l’oeil murals into the streetscape of the Village of Great Neck Plaza will beautify the village while strengthening the economy of the area. The mural series will weave a strong thread of cultural vitality through the traditional patterns and scale of the village. It will encourage visitors to explore the commercial district on foot and complement its user-friendly character by providing one-of-a-kind incentives to stay longer and explore further. The murals will attract the sustained attention of media and travel guides to showcase Great Neck Plaza as a fascinating and multi-dimensional destination, helping to revitalize and energize the commercial district.

The program also has social ramifications. It has the potential to make the spirit of community visible, cross-linking neighborhoods and groups as well as exploring and celebrating the role of the many cultures and influences over the decades. The artist has and will continue to engage the public directly in the creation of the art, inviting residents to shape and influence the design of the murals. The goal is to build a stronger sense of connection between constituent groups and make the village a more exciting and vital place to live, work, shop and play. The murals will achieve their impact through a careful integration with the streetscape and the community fabric, through a sense of surprise and through a strong aesthetic quality. They will appear to be real, yet they will be beautiful, permanent painted illusions, creating public cultural assets that retain a sense of freshness and charisma for many years.

The primary theme for this mural program is the transcultural identity of the village, with a secondary theme of its history in the arts. A symbolic connection between all of the murals is the metaphor of portals and passages.

Children of various backgrounds and ages wait for a music lesson or performance in the Maple Drive Mural Project, which will provide a landmark on Middle Neck Road and increase the visibility of the Great Neck Arts Center.
Many people do not realize how diverse America has been right from the beginning, or how the nation's strength has always developed from that diversity, and not in spite of it. This is one of the most interesting and compelling aspects of the transculturation theme. It is possible for a mural series to address this subject in interesting ways that can help create understanding and ease tensions between various groups who share this community.

Many waves of immigrants have made Great Neck Plaza home. The proximity to New York City has contributed to its diversity, as has the proximity of large estates in Great Neck, bringing immigrants seeking relatively affordable housing to the village, especially in the area north of Cutter Mill Road. The third influence was the location of the United Nations at Lake Success from 1946 to 1951, which added to the village's international flavor.

Doors are evocative of possibilities, and of opportunities, openings, and the unknown. They can symbolize the creative tension of opposites since they can be both barriers or entry points. Passages are also symbolic — evoking journeys, transitions, growth, and change. Diversity clearly implies that there have been many disparate journeys to this place. These metaphors allow for the natural inclusion of human figures and lend themselves to an efficient treatment of large wall areas by providing detailed focal points, leaving large areas as background. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this metaphor provides an ideal vehicle for artistic interventions in the streetscape that can be both unobtrusive and surprising, and that can complement and augment the architectural fabric of the village.

A secondary thematic approach is to highlight and celebrate the strong history of the arts in this area, an approach used indirectly in both murals that are part of Phase 1. This theme can be developed more fully and directly in future murals.
The Arts and Opportunity

It has been said that if you want to touch the past, touch a stone; if you want to touch the present, touch a rose. And if you want to touch the future, touch a child. The Maple Drive Mural Project will transform a plain brick wall into a public artwork that is prominent from Middle Neck Road and helps to identify and add visibility to the Great Neck Arts Center, the leading cultural asset of Great Neck Plaza.

The mural series will begin with this small mural, demonstrating to a wide audience the value of integrating fine art into the streetscape and laying the foundation of public support for future work. The theme of this mural is the artistic vitality of Great Neck and the opportunity the arts offer to everyone, especially children. Painted with virtuoso trompe l'oeil techniques on durable cement panels, the mural will appear to be a part of the building. Viewers will not believe it is merely a painting. The children in the mural will be drawn from the diverse population of the community.

It is essential to educate young people about the value of the arts and to build upon existing cultural assets wherever possible. Studies show that when participation in the arts becomes high, many indicators of quality of life also show improvement. The arts build connections and strengthen the ties that bind us together, and they deliver tangible benefits on many levels simultaneously.
The Treasure House

Cutter Mill Road was named for the old Cutter grain mill, named in turn for its owner Bloodgood Haviland Cutter, said to be one of the most colorful characters in Long Island history. Although perhaps best known as Mark Twain's "Poet Lariat," Cutter was also famous as an avid collector. He traveled the world and brought back to Long Island hundreds of art objects and curios from many lands. He loved to show visitors his vast collection.

Current residents of Great Neck also hail from around the world. The Village is astonishingly diverse, with roots going back into many cultures, among them Dutch, English, African, Iranian, Japanese, Russian, Irish, Italian, Asian, Greek, Israeli, and others. All cultures serve human needs in fundamental ways, but aesthetics, materials and customs vary from culture to culture. This mural uses a symbol common to all cultures — the vessel — in order to represent the diverse cultural threads brought forward in time by residents. Vessels of all shapes and ages will be gathered from and with the help of the community into a public still life that symbolizes and honors the traditions and customs of societies, ethnicities, and nationalities represented in the village. Museum pieces or other rare items may be included, and will be faithfully reproduced by the artist.

This mural has superb visibility and will create a dramatic sense of arrival to the downtown for drivers approaching on Cutter Mill Road. It will transform an uninviting wall into a prominent, memorable, magnetic landmark to showcase the artistic and cultural vitality of the village. It can leverage significant benefits to the core business district. A new pocket park in front of this wall will soften the hardscape in this area and provide a safe place from which to examine the mural from close range.
The Transformational Art of Artist William M. Cochran

William Cochran was recently identified in Robert Bersson’s new art history textbook, *Responding to Art*, as one of six notable figures in the field of public art in North America from 1960 to the present in its *Timeline of Artists and Art* (McGraw-Hill, 2003, p. A11).

Working with his wife and partner, Teresa, he creates innovative, permanent public artworks that are carefully woven into and rooted within their social and architectural environments. He often reverses the traditional creative process, engaging and interpreting the imaginative power of the non-arts audience. His work combines light, color, perspective, and the thoughts of many people to captivate residents and visitors alike, creating catalysts for community building on cultural, social and economic levels. He works with design teams and community groups in shaping the design and meaning of these landmarks.

Cochran is both a virtuoso *trompe l’oeil* painter and an architectural glass artist. He was the first American to be invited to Keim Mineral
Paints in Augsburg, Germany, for in-depth training in the legendary 120-year-old mural technique of Purkristalat (water glass), which creates murals that last for many decades and are impervious to everything from fire to acid rain. He is one of a handful of living artists adept at the difficult and mind-bending Renaissance perspective techniques of anamorphic projection, which create astonishing illusions of depth and dimension when viewed at an angle. He is also co-founder of the socially-oriented public art non-profit Shared Vision.

He recently completed a large work of architectural art glass for the new headquarters of the Regional Arts Commission in St. Louis. His acclaimed Community Bridge mural project transformed a plain concrete bridge in Frederick, Maryland, into the detailed painted illusion of an old stone bridge (www.sharedvision.org). He engaged thousands of individuals from throughout the community and internationally as co-creators. The result is a work that speaks with the voice of the community, bridging divisions between people and sparking renewal at the city’s core.

He is currently working with Search for Common Ground to develop a large participatory public art project in Cincinnati.

He has won numerous awards, including the Award for Excellence from the American Glass Association, the Core Values Award from the International Association for Public Participation, and Project of the Year from the American Public Works Association. He regularly keynotes national and international conferences and speaks at colleges and universities.
A Public-Private Partnership

The murals of Great Neck Plaza will be created through a public-private partnership. The village will contribute partial funding, to be matched by gifts from public-spirited corporations, foundations and private citizens. This is a model that has been followed successfully by many other municipalities across the nation.

Cities across the country have turned to the arts and the development of cultural assets as the most cost-effective and successful strategy available to them to revitalize their downtowns and foster social and cultural renewal.

Murals of exceptional quality can transform blank walls into powerful, hard-working assets. This is an excellent solution for communities seeking to spark renewal but who cannot afford or have no space for large cultural assets such as museums or concert halls. This mural series offers a timely opportunity for residents to make a major, prominent, and permanent difference in their community, adding to its unique aesthetic qualities, building its economy, highlighting its cultural richness, and leaving a legacy of beauty and prosperity for generations to come. It is an opportunity to reinforce the special sense of place that Great Neck Plaza is known for, illuminating its historic identity and strengthening the ties that bind the community together. Materials used to create these murals last for decades and will not fade or peel. Donors will be recognized as community visionaries on permanent bronze plaques at each mural site, in special events and in literature that educates the public about the purpose and themes of the murals and how they came about.
GREAT NECK PLAZA CULTURAL INITIATIVE:
MURAL PROGRAM

The Village of Great Neck Plaza has developed an unprecedented initiative to simultaneously beautify the village, build visitor traffic and prosperity, celebrate our heritage and strengthen our cultural identity.

The goal of this initiative is to develop a series of fine art murals by the nation’s leading trompe l’oeil muralist that are sensitively integrated into the fabric of the village. These murals are unlike anything you may have seen before in their beauty and the convincing nature of their illusions.

The mural series is a way to energize the downtown core by weaving a strong thread of cultural vitality through the traditional patterns and scale of the village. It will encourage visitors to explore the village on foot and augment its visitor-friendly character by providing major incentives to stay longer and explore further. In addition, the murals will draw ongoing media attention and listings in tour guides and on travel web sites that will showcase the village as a destination. Since Great Neck Plaza is located a short drive or train ride from a potential audience of millions, this can strongly aid the revitalization of the commercial district.

The program also has social ramifications. If it is carefully conceived, it is capable of strengthening the spirit of community by cross-linking neighborhoods and groups as well as exploring and celebrating the role of the many cultures and influences that have built our village over the decades. The result will be an “outdoor gallery” of architectural murals that appear so real that many people will walk by them and not realize they are there at first.

We are working with William and Teresa Cochran and the non-profit organization Shared Vision on this initiative. They are dedicated to building public art projects in urban areas that engage the creative input of people of all backgrounds. The astonishing works they create involve the public directly in the creative process, weaving their thoughts together to shape the meaning and design of the art.

Mr. Cochran works in a diversity of media and is a master painter. A major new college-level textbook in art history and art appreciation (Responding to Art, Robert Berson, McGraw-Hill, 2003) has named him as a leading figure in contemporary public art in North America, saying, “We marvel at artist William Cochran’s magical, almost godlike power to transform a plain concrete surface.” He is one of a handful of living artists adept at the difficult, mind-bending Renaissance perspective techniques of anamorphic projection. This technique creates astonishing illusions of depth and spatial dimension when viewed at an angle.

This exciting new initiative in the Village will be a public-private partnership between the Village of Great Neck Plaza, community organizations, such as the B.I.D., the Great Neck Chamber of Commerce, the Great Neck Arts Center, Rotary Club International, Kiwanis, and many private and corporate donors. This is an unprecedented opportunity to have a hand in creating significant, long-term benefits for our community.

For this program to move forward, we need your help and support! Donors will be invited to a special reception to meet the artist, and their names will appear in a special dedication program. Those who give $1,000 or more will have their names permanently displayed in public at the mural site on a large bronze plaque that lists the community visionaries that made
this happen. Donors of $5,000 or more will receive more prominent recognition on the plaque as well as an archival-quality limited-edition print of the mural design signed by Mr. Cochran, only ten such signed, prints will be made.

Donors of $10,000 or more will receive top billing on the plaque and will receive one of only 5 large special-edition prints from Mr. Cochran.

We need your help! Please consider sending a gift of any amount to help make this happen!

The Great Neck Cultural Initiative: Mural Program Giving Opportunities

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<td>Lead Donor</td>
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<td>Village Visionary</td>
<td>$10,000 Visionary level on the plaque, plus large, limited-edition print and benefits below</td>
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<td>Village Leader</td>
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<td>Village Patron</td>
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Thank you for your help and support! Please enclose a copy of this page with your donation made payable to “Village of Great Neck Plaza, Mural Program” and mail it to: Village of Great Neck Plaza, Village Hall, 2 Gussack Plaza, P.O. Box 440, Great Neck, NY 11022 Attn: Patricia O’Byrne, Clerk-Treasurer. All contributions are 100% tax deductible to the extent permitted by law and donors should consult their tax advisor. Please call us with any questions at (516) 482-4500.

Name______________________________________________ Amount enclosed:_______________
Address____________________________________________ E-mail:________________________
______________________________________________ Phone:__________________________

Please provide your signature and write below the name(s) you wish to appear on the bronze plaque:

______________________________________________

Signed and agreed to: ___________________________ Dated: ___________________________ 
Donor’s Signature