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HEADLINE: PROGRAM PUTS WORKS OF ART OUT IN THE OPEN;
CULTURAL PROJECTS ESCAPE MUSEUMS IN \$1.5 MILLION VOTER-BACKED
PLAN

BYLINE: Ivette M. Yee Staff Writer

BODY:

Sumptuous murals in a multitude of colors, artsy benches that attract photographers as well as pedestrians and sculptures fit for a garden. The public will be seeing a lot more art in the community and it won't be in museums.

Palm Beach County's Art in Public Places program is moving forward with \$1.5 million for art projects.

Borrowing from a culture and recreation measure approved by voters in 2002 will fund about 10 projects to be placed throughout the county, including at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach and the South County Civic Center west of Delray Beach, county officials said.

Public art can take many forms, from shade-providing breezeways to art deco-styled building entrances. Public art locations also frequently become gathering places for the community.

The Gates in New York City's Central Park was a recent public art project of grand scale, featuring a series of saffron-colored, free-flowing fabric panels hung from the top of a series of gates throughout the park. It attracted more than 4 million visitors and generated an estimated \$254 million in economic activity, according to the New York City mayor's office.

"Public art enhances the beauty of an environment, making it functional and pleasing to look at all at the same time," said Elayna Toby Singer, the county's first full-time Art in Public Places administrator. "It notches up the curb appeal and engages all citizens of the county in art."

This summer, the South County Courthouse in Delray Beach will be getting a huge facelift. Miami artists Carlos Alves and Andrew Reid are creating large

murals and tiled seating, including a pineapple-shaped bench, for the courthouse exterior.

Noted Vermont artist Michael Singer has built an artistic structure that doubles as a security barrier at the main courthouse in downtown West Palm Beach. Other projects in discussion include a Black Heritage Trail and a Lake Okeechobee Community Arts Trail.

Formerly run by a county Cultural Council, the public art program now is part of the Facilities Development and Operations Department, where Singer works with county planners, facilities managers and employees who work in the buildings where art will be placed.

In the future, the county may consider a law requiring a percentage of all county capital-improvement, expansion and renovation spending to be dedicated to public art, Singer said. In the meantime, administrators are hoping county planners will see building opportunities as opportunities for public art.

The County Commission appointed people with arts backgrounds to a committee that selects artists for public projects.

"With public art we really have an opportunity in this county to make public places more interesting and inviting," said County Commissioner Mary McCarty, who heads the committee. "Public art will show the community the artistic talent we have here."

An ongoing public art show takes place along the main concourse of Palm Beach International Airport and features a new exhibit by local artists every four months. More than 300,000 visitors pass by, public art officials said.

"I know when I get off a plane I look forward to seeing art, instead of just plain walls," said Mary Anne Frye, an artist from West Palm Beach who has seen the airport shows.

The current exhibit, "Bright Sights, Electrifying Nights," showcases seven Palm Beach County artists who explore scenes and sounds of South Florida through photography, painting and poetry.

"I'm hoping a lot of people see my work and I can sell them or at least get people to visit my studio," said Judith Rodman Flescher of Palm Beach Gardens, whose vibrant palm tree paintings bordered with collage are on display.

Some artists say they aren't the only ones who benefit from public art.

"I think it a great way to educate the public about the arts," said Maria Richards, an artist from West Palm Beach. "The more they notice it, the more they will appreciate it."

The county has taken a substantial step toward a serious public arts program, but it's still too early to tell whether the program will have legs, county leaders said.

"There are so many needs in this county, and public art is seen as a wonderful amenity," McCarty said. "I think each commissioner is going to have to see it in their own districts to see the contribution it's making before they decide if they're going to support it."

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ABOUT ART IN PUBLIC PLACES

Palm Beach County Art in Public Places is looking for artists to participate in upcoming projects. Register online at www.pbcgov.com/fdo/Art/Registry.htm

For more information, call 561-233-0235 or visit the Art in Public Places Web site, www.pbcgov.com/fdo/Art/home.htm

NOTES:

GRAPHIC: PHOTO 3 MAP; FREQUENT FLIER GALLERY: Palm Beach International Airport displays works by Judith Rodman Flescher through the Art in Public Places program. "I'm hoping a lot of people see my work and I can sell them or at least get people to visit my studio," the Palm Beach Gardens artist said. Staff photo, Mark Randall JUDICIAL BENCHES: Miami artist Carlos Alves designs tiles for benches to be placed outside the South County Courthouse in Delray Beach. Staff photo, Judy Sloan Reich FACE OF PUBLIC ART: Carlos Alves of Miami is among several artists participating in Palm Beach County's Art in Public Places program. "Public art enhances the beauty of an environment, making it functional and pleasing to look at all at the same time," said Elayna Toby Singer, who directs the county program. Artists say both they and the public will see benefits. Staff photo, Judy Sloan Reich Map: Locates Palm Beach County public arts projects. SOURCE: Palm Beach County Art in Public Places. Staff graphic, Cindy Jones-Hulfachor