



ESPO Paints 'Love Letter to Brooklyn' on Vintage Macy's Garage Wednesday, September 14, 2011

By Abbie Fentress Swanson : Culture Editor & Interactive Content Producer

The renowned Philadelphia artist and sign painter Stephen Powers, who many know by his old tag name ESPO, is putting the finishing touches on a piece of monumental street art on the outside of an old Macy's parking garage in downtown Brooklyn.



Stephen Powers and his team painted "Love Letter to Brooklyn" on a Macy's parking garage on Hoyt St. between Fulton St. and Livingston (Abbie Fentress Swanson/WNYC)

The piece, called "Love Letter to Brooklyn," is made up of lines like "I cop futures here," "Onward, upward," "Home," "I was nurtured here," "I am made to leave, I am made to return," "Born busy as a Brooklyn bound B" and "Is you for me?" The team used rollers and house paint from Lowe's in Brooklyn to create the work on the garage exterior.

So far, "Love Letter to Brooklyn" had taken 13 days to paint, and Powers estimates it will take three more. The piece was largely inspired by conversations he and his team of a dozen painters had with people passing by the parking garage. Powers also interviewed long-time Brooklyn resident David Villorrente for the piece, who grew up in housing

projects nine blocks away. It turned out this particular Macy's had a special resonance for Villorente.

"He saw Santa at Macy's as a child," said Powers. "The first time he had money, he spent it at Macy's. He was employed there as a teenager and passes through currently as a local resident."

Powers said when he got the commission from Macy's for the project, it was important to him that it reflect thoughts from members of the community of downtown Brooklyn.

"I found that when I worked in Coney Island in 2003 and '04 and '05 that really the strength was to go to the center of the community and broadcast out to the periphery as opposed to being at the periphery and trying to go towards the center," he said. "Once I understood what the city was thinking and feeling, then I could translate that and paint it on a wall."

The project was partially designed by Powers before it was painted and evolved with feedback from the community.

"We're still taking suggestions, so if you pass by and you see us working, feel free to yell up anything at us," he said. "We'll try to work it into what we're doing."

Prior to his "Love Letter to Brooklyn," Powers painted poems on roofs and buildings in Philadelphia and in Syracuse. He's also painted a series of quotes by ad man David Ogilvy onto the walls of the New York Ogilvy & Mather offices.

"Who better than graffiti writer turned professional sign painter ESPO to pen an ode to Brooklyn and add some much-needed visual interest to an otherwise monumentally drab parking garage?" said Katherine Lorimer, who takes photos of street art around town of graffiti as Luna Park.

But not everyone is excited about the garage's facelift.

"I think it's awful. Absolutely awful," said Kenneth Kerpen, who has lived in the neighborhood for years. "I'm parking my car here and I'm really disappointed I have to look at this nonsense."

But Al Dawkins, a former graffiti artist from the Bronx turned retired NYPD cop (tag name: Chico Butch), disagreed.

"I love it," he said. "You know, I wish we could see more of this all over the city."

Fans of the work will be glad to hear there is more Steve Powers coming to downtown Brooklyn. His team will soon be working on a piece that will sit prominently on Fulton Mall. They're also working on getting permission to paint several other pieces on buildings in the neighborhood.

"Love Letter to Brooklyn," which sits on on Hoyt St. between Rivington St. and Fulton St., will be finished this week.