

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## Love Letter to Philadelphia

*A new series of murals runs along an elevated train route*  
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A team of 40 painters led by artist Stephen Powers is putting the final touches on an ambitious art project in Philadelphia this week. The results of their labor won't be in one of the city's museums or galleries, but on buildings along the elevated train route in West Philadelphia.

When completed, the project, called "Love Letter," will include 50 rooftop and street-level murals, each depicting a cryptic love note. In one piece, colored refrigerator magnet-style letters on a white background spell out the phrase "If you were here I'd be home now."



Photo: Adam Wallacavage

"I saw this as an opportunity to reclaim the space on these rooftops and reexamine graffiti," said Mr. Powers, who grew up in West Philadelphia but now lives in New York.



Photo: Adam Wallacavage

A former graffiti artist, Mr. Powers used the neighborhood as his illegal canvas as a teenager and young adult. Now 41, he has had his work shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Deitch Projects in New York and the Venice Biennial. Last summer, he caused a stir with an installation piece at Brooklyn's Coney Island that was a statement on waterboarding.

The murals were done with the city's permission, in a partnership with Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program, funded by a \$260,000 grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage through the Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative. Mural Arts, a government and nonprofit hybrid, was started as an antigraffiti initiative in 1984 and has since commissioned more than 3,000 murals and other works of public art. Mr. Powers first came into contact with the organization when it tried to recruit him as a teenager, though he refused to join.

This summer, he and the other artists involved have spent about three weeks painting 35 locations (normally the program spends three months on a single mural). The official unveiling takes place early next month, but most of the murals can be viewed now. Guided tours will be available starting in September.