

PUBLIC SCHOOL
No 12

Off The Wall

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Off the wall idea not so crazy

By Jorge Fitz-Gibbon

Staff Writer

For years, Yonkers city and police officials have worked to wipe out the unsightly graffiti that sprouts up seemingly at random on city walls.

But a new Yonkers program is trying a different strategy.

Titled "Off the Wall," the program links the Yonkers Community Action Program and the city's Youth Bureau to give graffiti writers an outlet while adding a splash of color to southwest Yonkers.

The idea, said program organizer Ken Davis, is to get the most talented of the artists "on the canvas and off the wall."

"It's like a hot line to the graffiti community," explained Davis, a member of the YCAP Board of Directors and a Yonkers police

officer with the department's Community Affairs Division.

Judith Wilson, YCAP executive director, said Davis oversees the program, the Youth Bureau supplies the paint and YCAP provides the space.

"I think that graffiti and rap are the new forms of communication," Wilson said. "If we don't understand what the young people are saying to each other, how are we going to communicate?"

YCAP led the way by offering its 164 Ashburton Ave. headquarters, the former School 12, as the first "canvas." Wilson said three Ashburton Avenue landlords will follow suit, having offered their walls for artworks.

Ultimately, Davis said he hopes to get the young artists indoors and working on real canvas. Wilson said YCAP is considering using its auditorium as an art

studio to further encourage the street-bred artists.

One of those artists is David LaChapell, who painted the debut artwork adorning the outside of the YCAP building. LaChapell goes by the graffiti name, or tag, of Say Sixx.

LaChapell's work on the front wall of the dark-red YCAP building has been on display for two weeks. Tomorrow, graffiti artist Luis "Maze" Hernandez is scheduled to paint over LaChapell's work with his own.

With a total of three artists signed up so far, Wilson said the idea is for a new artwork to replace the previous one every two weeks. Wilson said interested Yonkers graffiti artists should call her at YCAP, 423-5905. Applicants will be asked to fill out a form and be put on the waiting list for future slots.



OTW Production: Its doesn't have to be a death sentence, MASE1 & SAY-SIXX, 1992 - 2002

Gannett Suburban Newspapers

Awareness art



Staff photo/Mark Vergari

Yonkers mural artists Say Sixx and Mase 1, stand yesterday morning in front of their AIDS/HIV awareness mural, which is painted on the side of a building at Summit Street and Ashburton Avenue. Yonkers Community Action Program and the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute funded the mural.



OTW Production: In fear of AIDS you should be, POSE2, 1992 - 2002



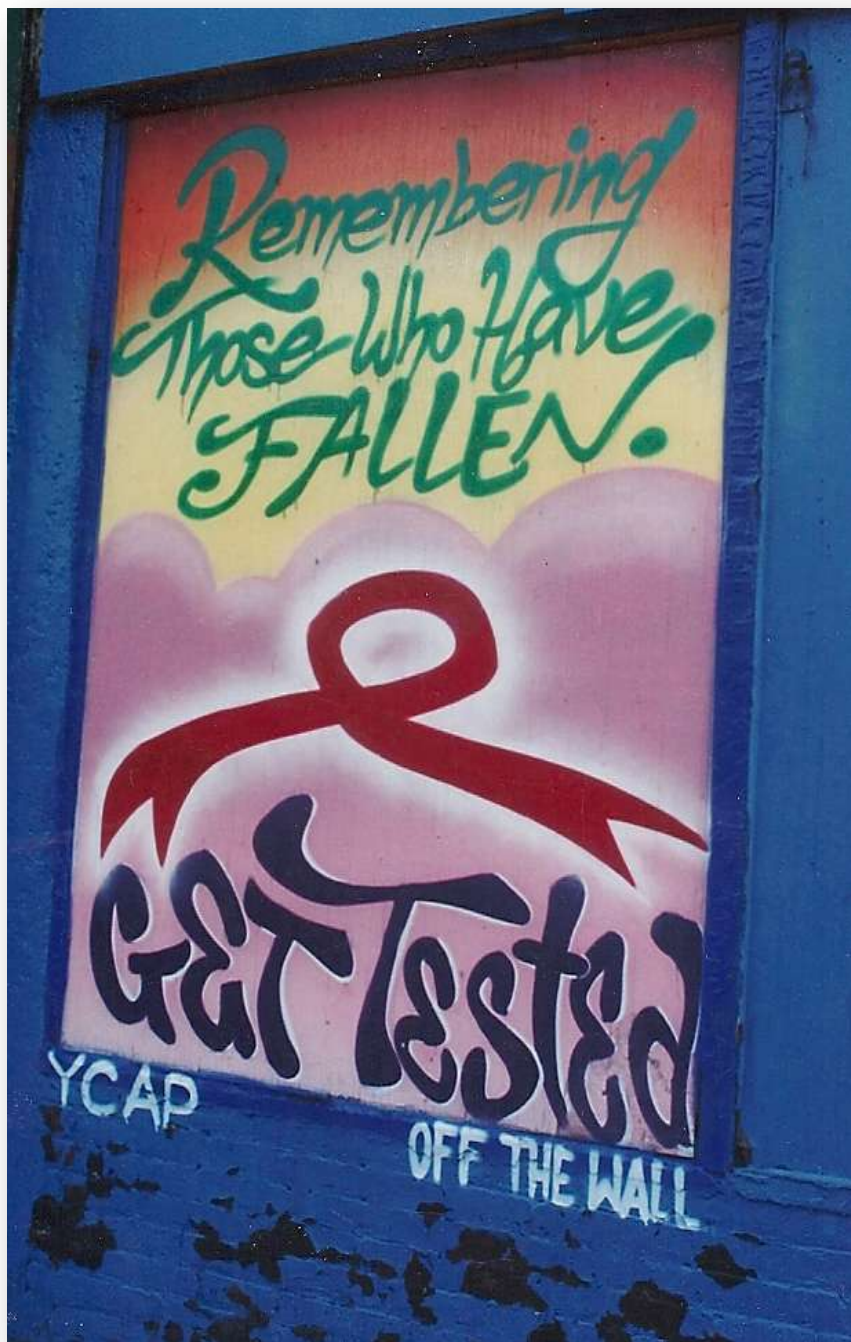
OTW Production: It takes a family, CLIFTON MATHIAS, 1992 - 2002



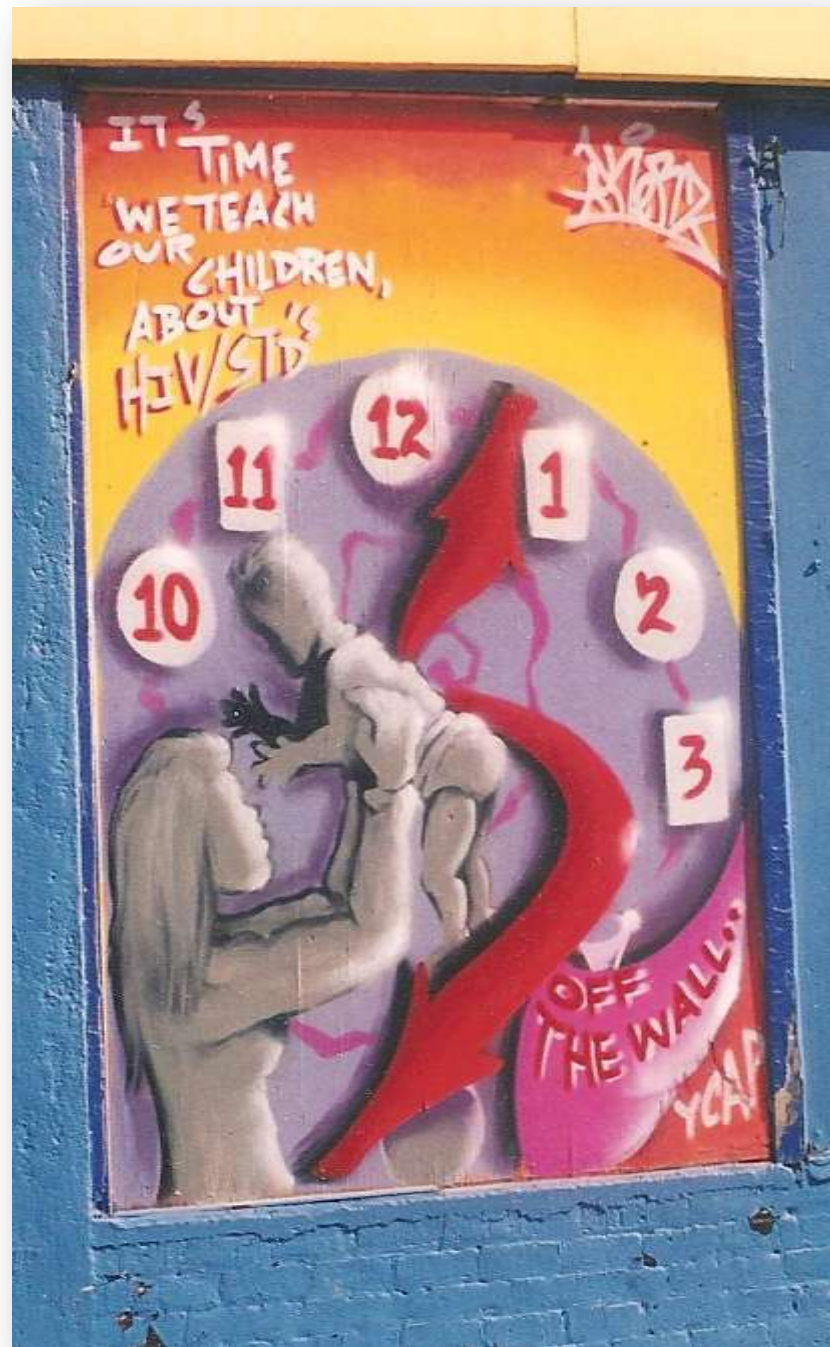
OTW Production: Don't gamble way, you may end up fighting the game of life, NEKS, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: Its not a computer virus, its real, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



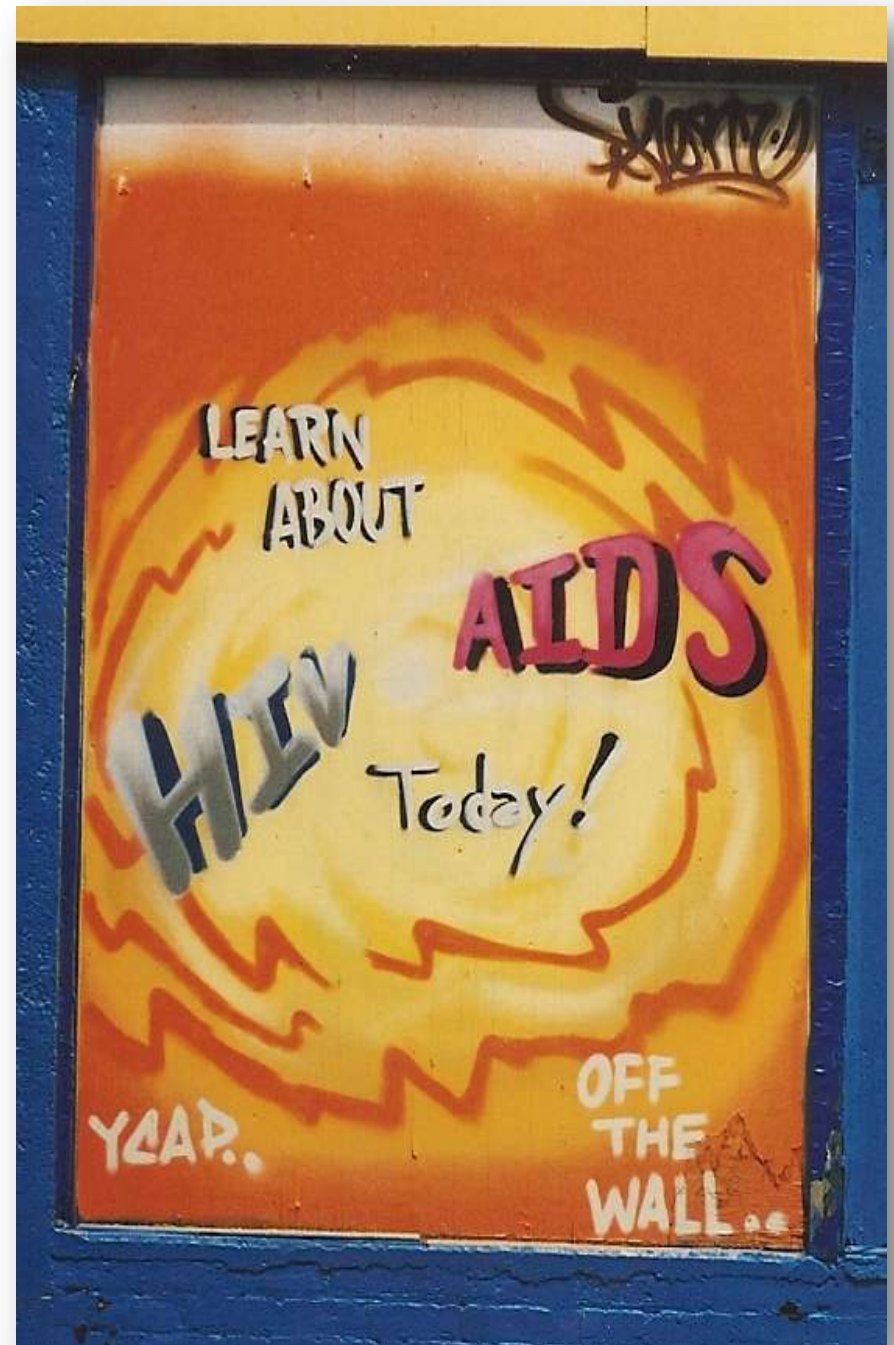
OTW Production: REMEMBERING, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: TIME TO TEACH, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: LIFE – HIV, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: LEARN ABOUT, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: FIGHT AIDS, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: HIV AIDS AWARENES, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: Its IN HIS HANDS, CLARK 1992 - 2002

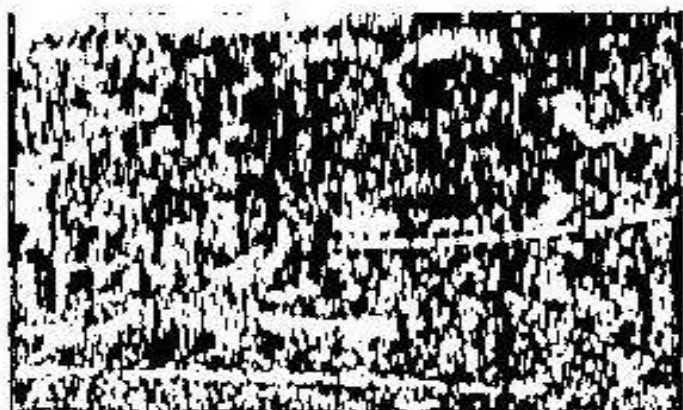


OTW Production: LEARN ABOUT HIV/AIDS; KERZ & OTHERS, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: LIFE IS SHORT, DON'T MAKE IT SHORTER, KERZ, 1992 - 2002

THE WALL



What has
graffiti
done for
you late-
ly? In
Yonkers,
a group of
hand-
picked

aerosol artists were merged together to form a group called "Off the Wall—Graffiti for AIDS." In 1992, the late Judith Wilson met a young graffiti writer named Kerz (Louis Hernandez). She acknowledged his talents, respected the artform and recognized graffiti as a powerful visual medium. As director of the Yonkers Community Action Program, Wilson created an avenue where graffiti artists could use their talents to assist in the struggle for AIDS awareness.

Off the Wall, The Source Magazine August 1995, p25

After commissioning graffiti artists to paint the outside of the Yonkers Community Action Program (YCAP) building, Wilson petitioned the state of New York for funding to assist in the fight against AIDS. In late 1993, YCAP was granted \$67,000 to enlighten the community about AIDS through graffiti. Aerosol artists Nase, Ker 2, Jel Clark, Sude, Sae and others were thoroughly trained as AIDS educators, gave seminars to high school students and other teens and painted some funky pieces depicting the effects of this deadly disease.

Although the program secured another year's budget, not all of this is a pretty picture. Off The Wall's graffiti art is currently under attack from Yonkers city government officials who view spray paint and graffiti art as a threat to law and order. This art form's ability to evolve into an international vehicle of communication for the underground culture (Hip-Hop) has obviously exceeded the ability of many people's ability to comprehend it.

POOR AL



OTW Production: CLOSE THE DOOR, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: ITS TIME WE LEARN, KERZ, 1995.



OTW Production: LEARN ABOUT HIV/AIDS & JUDY WILSON - RIP, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: TOGETHER WE STAND, KERZ & Others, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: DON'T HIDE BEHIND THE MASK; OVIE, KERZ, NEZA & KOR., 1922 - 2002



OTW Production: SOMEONE MISSING; BOMBS, SIAR, HAMMA, KERZ, WISE & ZIE., 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: HEALTH WISE; POSE2, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: MYTHS ABOUT HIV/AIDS; KERZ, PHYME, KOR & OTHERS, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: PROTECT YOURSELF; JAES, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: EDUCATING OUR YOUTH; NEKS, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: NO BARRICADES; KINGBEE, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: YOU NEVER KNOW 1; OVIE, NEZA & KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: ITS OUT THERE; KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: YOU NEVER KNOW 2; OVIE, NEZA & KERZ, 1992 - 2002

Artists need three essential things to function: time, space and money.

Money is usually the most elusive of the three. Artists are perpetually faced with all kinds of extracurricular chores and choices in the name of survival.

After graduating from college with a degree in art, Ken Davis soon realized that he didn't have the business skills and contacts to make the money he needed to get by. As a result, he did what many artists do: He became a teacher. Still, the money was short so he found himself taking the test to become a Yonkers police officer.

"I figured if I didn't like it, I could always go back to teaching, but I found I liked it," Davis said. "That was 10 years ago."

Three years ago, Davis was selected to work on a project focusing on enforcing the anti-graffiti laws. He says graffiti is a combination of self-expression, communication networking and vandalism. Hence, he began researching graffiti and the systems that explain the subculture that exists in the city of Yonkers.

"For instance, you can tell what writers belong to what crews, what gangs, who's in allegiance and who the enemies are, et cetera," Davis explained.

Davis started teaching people in the community about what to look for. As a result, he planted the seed that Judy Wilson, the former director of the Yonkers Community Action Program, nourished into the Off the Wall project. The project has proved to be very effective in channeling the artistic energy of some would-be vandals into prophets of anti-violence, anti-drug and



VINNIE BAGWELL

AIDS awareness.

"Many times they (the programs) don't work," Davis said. "You really have to do assessments of the artists. Not only do they need a place to write, they need help in survival skills, getting work. They need to know how to make their skills work for them; they need to learn how to communicate with people about their art."

Muralist Frank "Mase" Villar, who often coordinates participating artists in the Off the Wall project, agrees with this philosophy: "I wasn't happy until I could do my art full time. . . . I open my studio to other artists who need space to work, and I let the young kids hang out so they can get the exposure and learn how artists work."

Villar conducts his City Boy urban art T-shirt business out of a storefront on Lawrence Street and encourages other artists to be progressive and entrepreneurial in their attitude about their art.

Davis' commitment to advocating that artists develop management and marketing skills has given him the impetus to continue to work with the artists and Joanne Gardner, director of the Off the Wall program, during his off hours.

They are creating a commu-

nity artists' exhibition — an opportunity for various visual artists, who normally might not have the chance, to show their work. It's not just graffiti, and includes fine art and photography.

For instance, Trina DeSpenza, an "untutored" painter originally from New Orleans, has been home raising five children. DeSpenza will exhibit formally for the first time in more than 10 years and confides, "I'm like a fueled jet still in the port."

Davis speculates, "It's going to be raw; you know, a little rough around the edges. It's our first exhibit, this is not SoHo, but they all are very talented and I still want some of these artists to have the experience of showing their work. I'd like to try to do this at least once a year."

Davis' longtime friend, Geneva Hilliard, a well-traveled fine artist-muralist, concurs that "we need a place where artists from different mediums can come together, share their ideas and bounce off each other's energies. This event is the beginning of an effort to do that."

Felix Vega, Luis Hernandez, Ken Davis, Mase Villard, Ruby Berrio, Geneva Hilliard and Trina DeSpenza will display their work from 6 to 8 p.m. tomorrow in the atrium at the Museum Junior High School, 656 Warburton Ave. Admission is free.

Vinnie Bagwell is a graphic designer and aspiring sculptor. She is a Yonkers native who moved back to the city after college 13 years ago. You may write her at the Herald Statesman, 1 Odell Plaza, Yonkers, N.Y. 10701; call 965-5000; or fax 696-8208.

Exhibit to get to art of it all



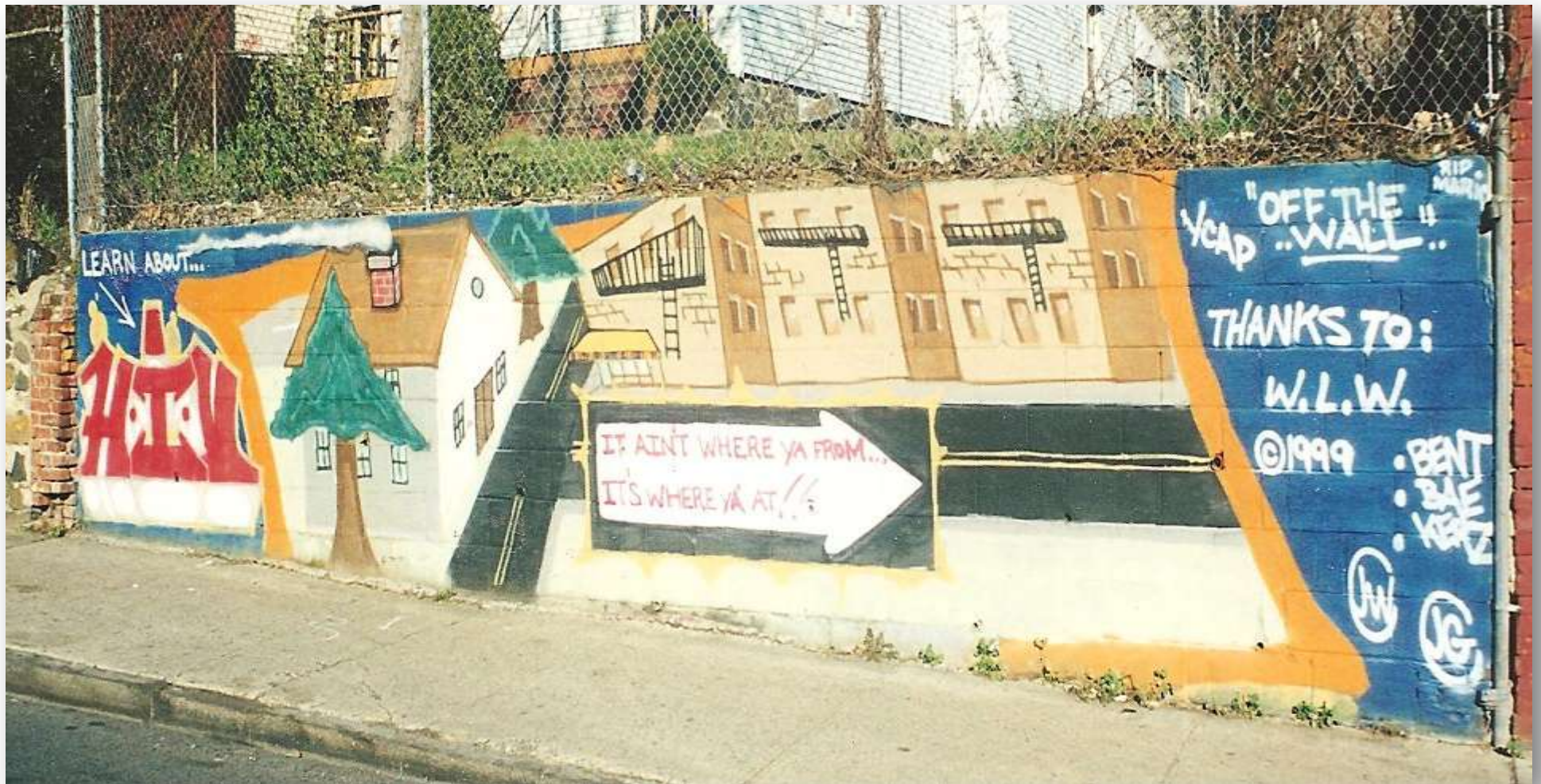
OTW Production: Off the Wall for AIDS AWARENESS; KERZ, ZIE & CLARK, 1992 - 2002



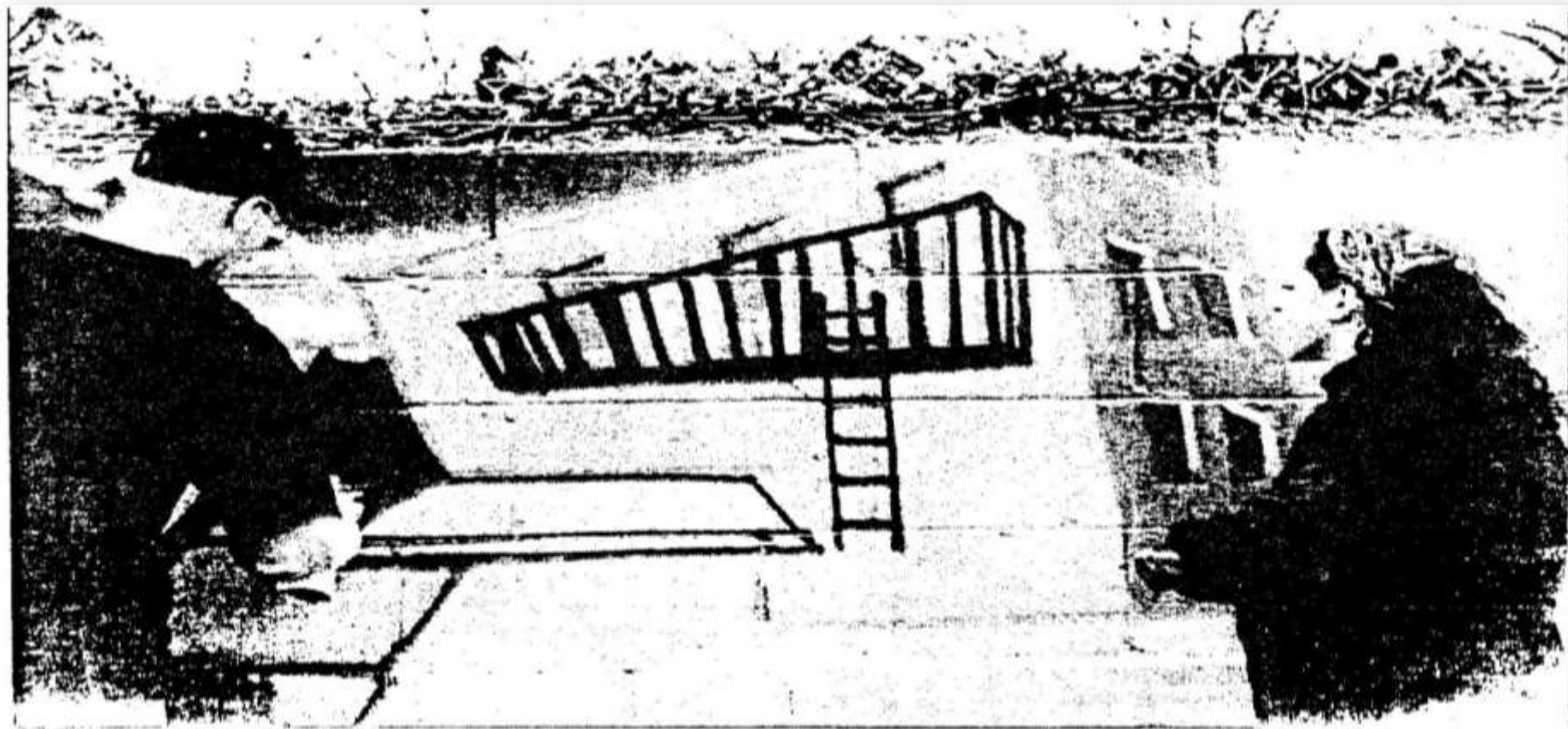
OTW Production: Off the Wall for AIDS AWARENESS; KERZ, ZIE & CLARK, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: Off the Wall for AIDS AWARENESS; KERZ, ZIE & CLARK, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: LEARN ABOUT HIV; BENT, BAE & KERZ, 1999





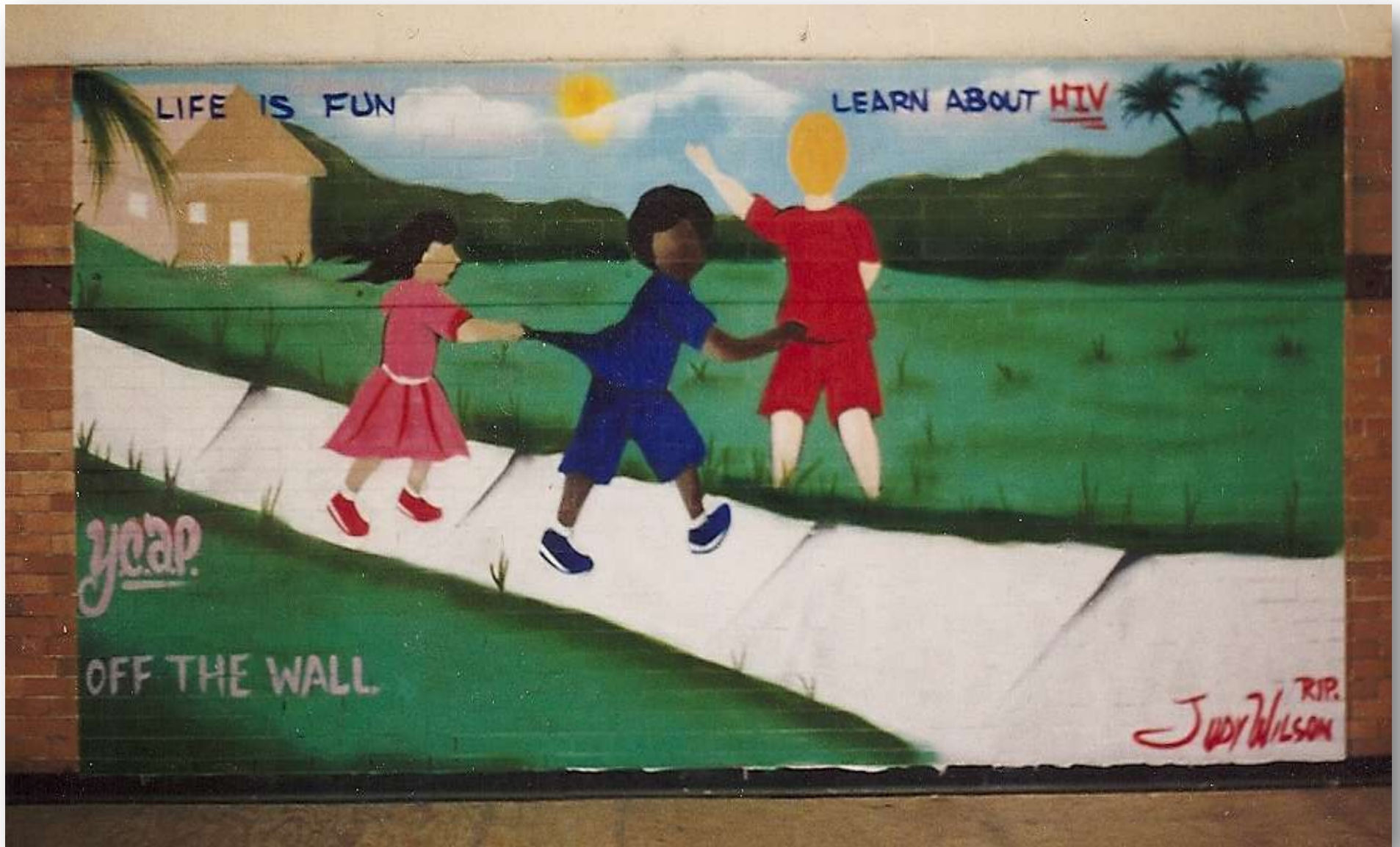
OTW Production: THE AIDS WALK; CLARK & SUDE, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: GLOBAL UNITY; KOOL & CLARK, 1998



OTW Production: PROTECT YOURSELF; JEL & OTHERS, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: LIFE IS FUN - RIP JUDY WILSON, KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: Production: LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL; KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: USE ALL YOUR SENSES; KOOL, ZIE & CLARK, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: STOP LETTING TIME FLY; NEKST, 1992 - 2002

Graffiti artists paint AIDS messages

Yonkers program uses murals to increase awareness of the disease

JORGE FITZ-GIBBON

The Journal News

YONKERS — Much of Luis Hernandez's young life consisted of "bombing," the urban artists' term for covertly painting their "tag" throughout the often drab cityscape they call home.

Now 23, Hernandez has found both a more legitimate use for his talent and a calling for it, turning his passion for graffiti into a public ser-

vice.

"It's not just about writing names on the wall," the Yonkers resident said. "It's a way of life for us. It's like a subculture. And if I can change one kid's life, if I can affect one kid after he looks at my mural, I'm good."

Hernandez, who paints under the name "Kerz," short for Yonkers, heads a crew of local urban artists who have peppered the city with AIDS awareness messages for seven years.

Their artwork, which adorns once-barren brick and concrete, is the visual

byproduct of Off the Wall, a project under the umbrella of the Yonkers Community Action Program and paid for by the state Health Department's AIDS Institute.

Off the Wall artists have painted dozens of AIDS awareness murals on the buildings of cooperating merchants and property owners or on canvas for display at community events and health fairs.

"I came on board not understanding graffiti or wanting a part of it, to be honest

Please see GRAFFITI, 9A



Ricky Flores/The Journal News

Luis Hernandez, founder of Off the Wall, signs the names of fellow members on the wall of a mural Hernandez created on Jones Place in Yonkers.

Graffiti artists paint to help AIDS awareness

GRAFFITI, from 1A

with you," said Joanne Gardner, Off the Wall's director. "Now I think it's fantastic because the message about HIV and AIDS has gotten to the kids in their language. They're not reading our pamphlets, but they're reading the art on the wall."

The program, based at the program's offices inside the former School 12 at 164 Ashburton Ave., was the brainchild of Yonkers Police Officer Ken Davis and the late Judith Wilson, YCAP's one-time executive director.

Davis, who is no longer involved with Off the Wall, is credited with naming it and first bringing the city's graffiti community into the fold. Ironically, Davis waged war on illegal graffiti artists before he and Wilson teamed up to create the program in 1992.

"I got a chance to meet graffiti artists, got to see what their motives were," Davis said. "I knew if I worked along with them . . . I would understand things from them, and I hoped they understood things from me."

Davis said he also envisioned the program as a way to bridge the gap between the graffiti subculture and mainstream society while delivering a positive message to the community.

"I think it's all about getting into the mainstream," Davis said. "They're getting the message out in a hip-hop way, because most of the things that they're learning now they weren't paying attention to before."

Hernandez was among a half-dozen renegade spray painters

who took a chance on the new project "being a setup" and signed up.

"I saw it as free paint, a free place to practice," he said. "I no longer had to steal paint because Judy gave it to me. I no longer had to go to the back of a parking lot because Judy was giving me the space."

Today, Gardner said Off the Wall's \$69,000 yearly price tag is paid for by the AIDS Institute, with the money paying for salaries, promotional materials and the continual need for paint and assorted art supplies.

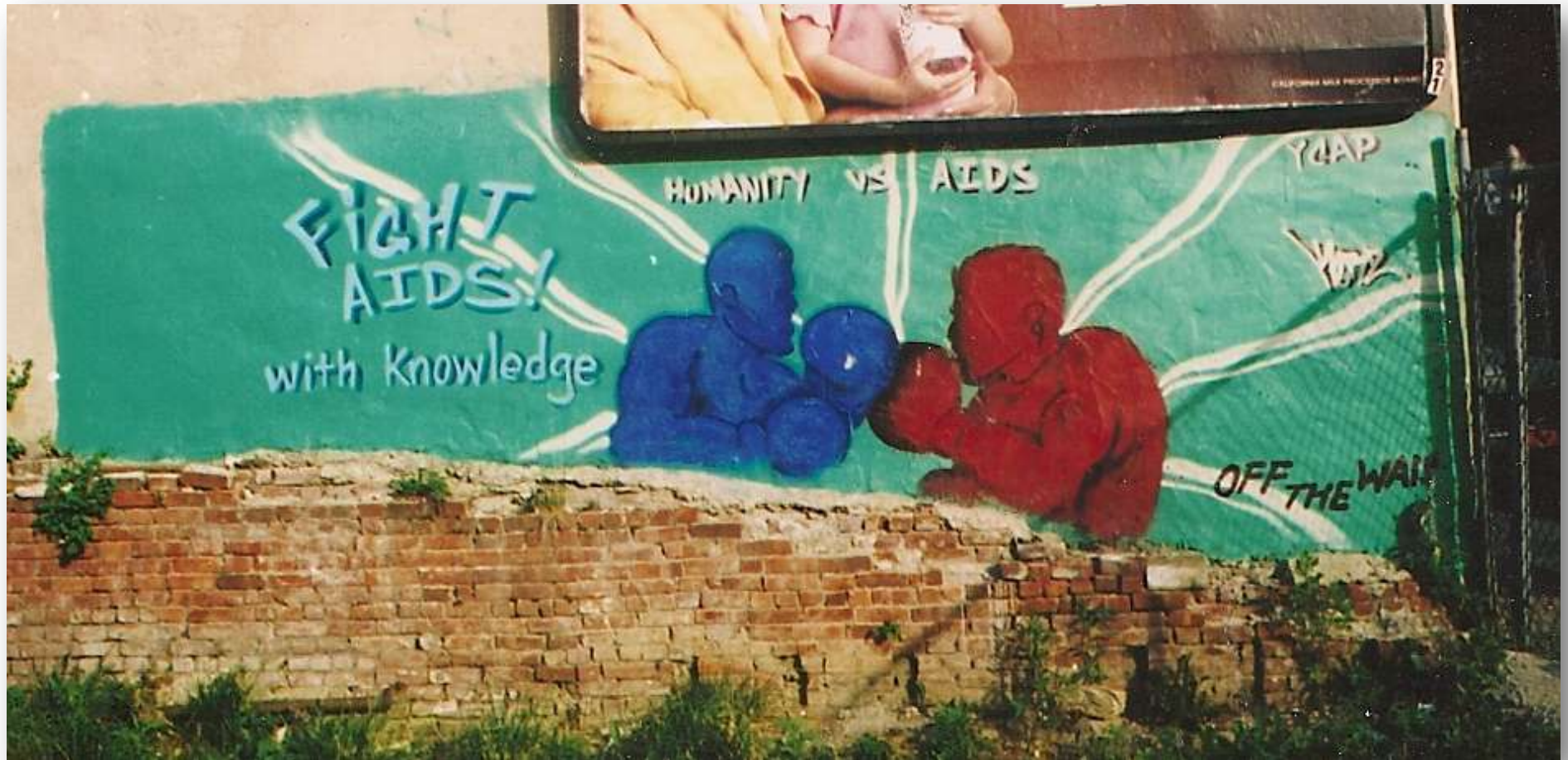
The aerosol Picassos are enlisted as either paid artists, of which there are currently five, or some of several unpaid apprentices. All must attend a seminar on AIDS-HIV awareness and prevention.

"Basically, I wanted to be able to do this art form and not get in trouble," said Off the Wall artist Rob Zalewski, 21. "Instead of going out there and getting arrested, I can get out there and help people."

The artists target youngsters by holding regular public service seminars at city schools, including a session on Wednesday at Gorton High School, as well as at local group homes and health-care and social-service facilities.

The message is always the same — protect yourself from HIV and AIDS.

"That's important," said 15-year-old Danny "Blame" Gomez, a graffiti artist who recently signed up as an apprentice. "You gotta protect yourself. You can't just go around having unprotected sex. Five minutes of fun can lead to a lifetime of pain."



OTW Production: FIGHT AIDS WITH KNOWLEDGE; KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: THE DIAMOND; MASE1, KERZ, JEL, JADE, SEM, HEEL,& XTREME, 1995



OTW Production: THE DIAMOND; MASE1, KERZ, JEL, JADE, SEM, HEEL,& XTREME, 1995



OTW Production: THE DIAMOND; MASE, KERZ, JEL, JADE, SEM, HEEL, NANCY & XTREME, 1995



OTW Production: ITS ALL FUN & GAMES; ZIE & CLARK, 1998



OTW Production: A LADY THAT MADE DREAMS INTO REALITY; CLARK, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: STOP THE SPREAD; CLARK, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: PROTECTION; CLARK & Others, 1992 - 2002



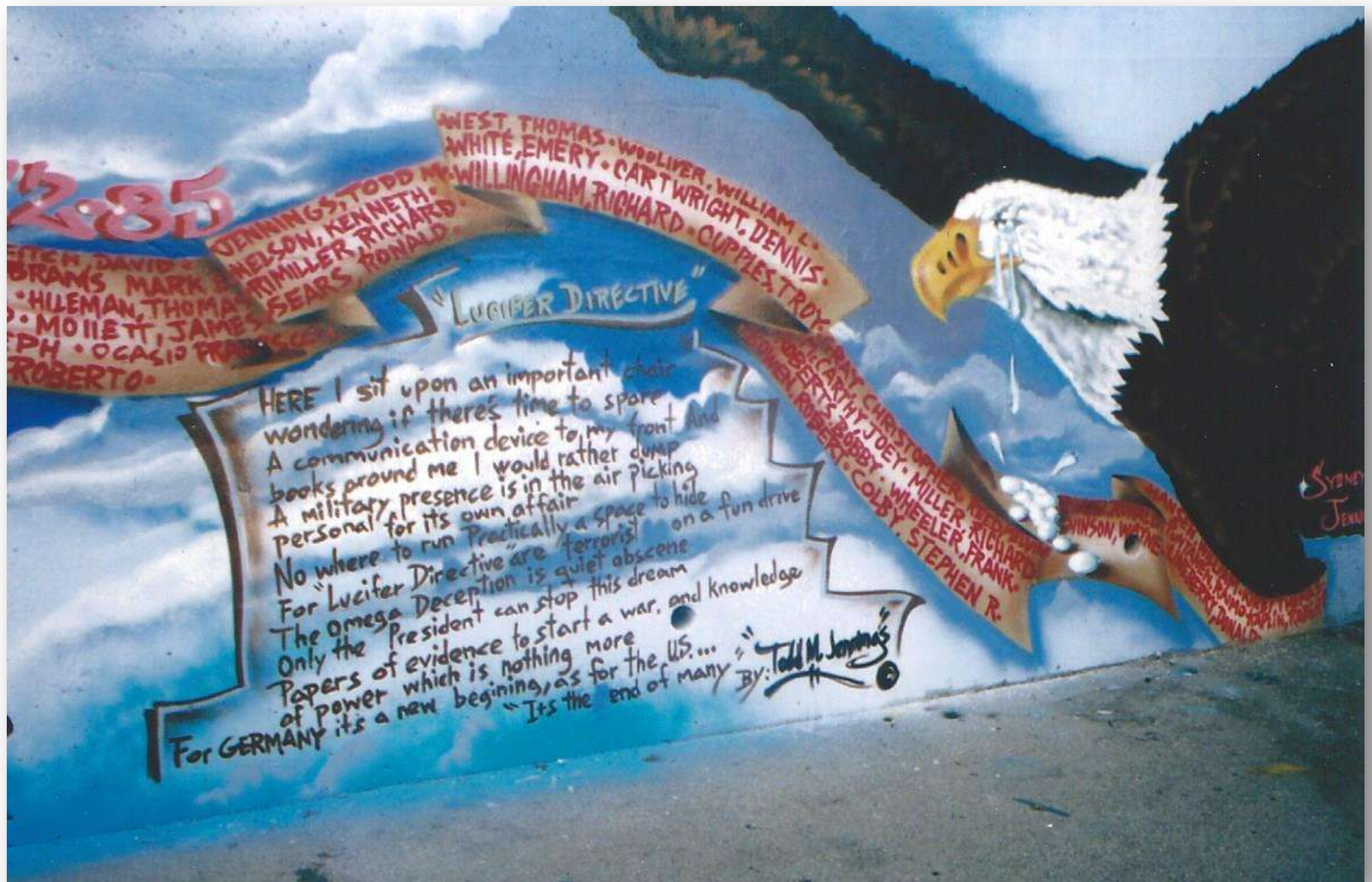
OTW Production: KEEP DRUGS OUT; KINGBEE, 1992 - 2002



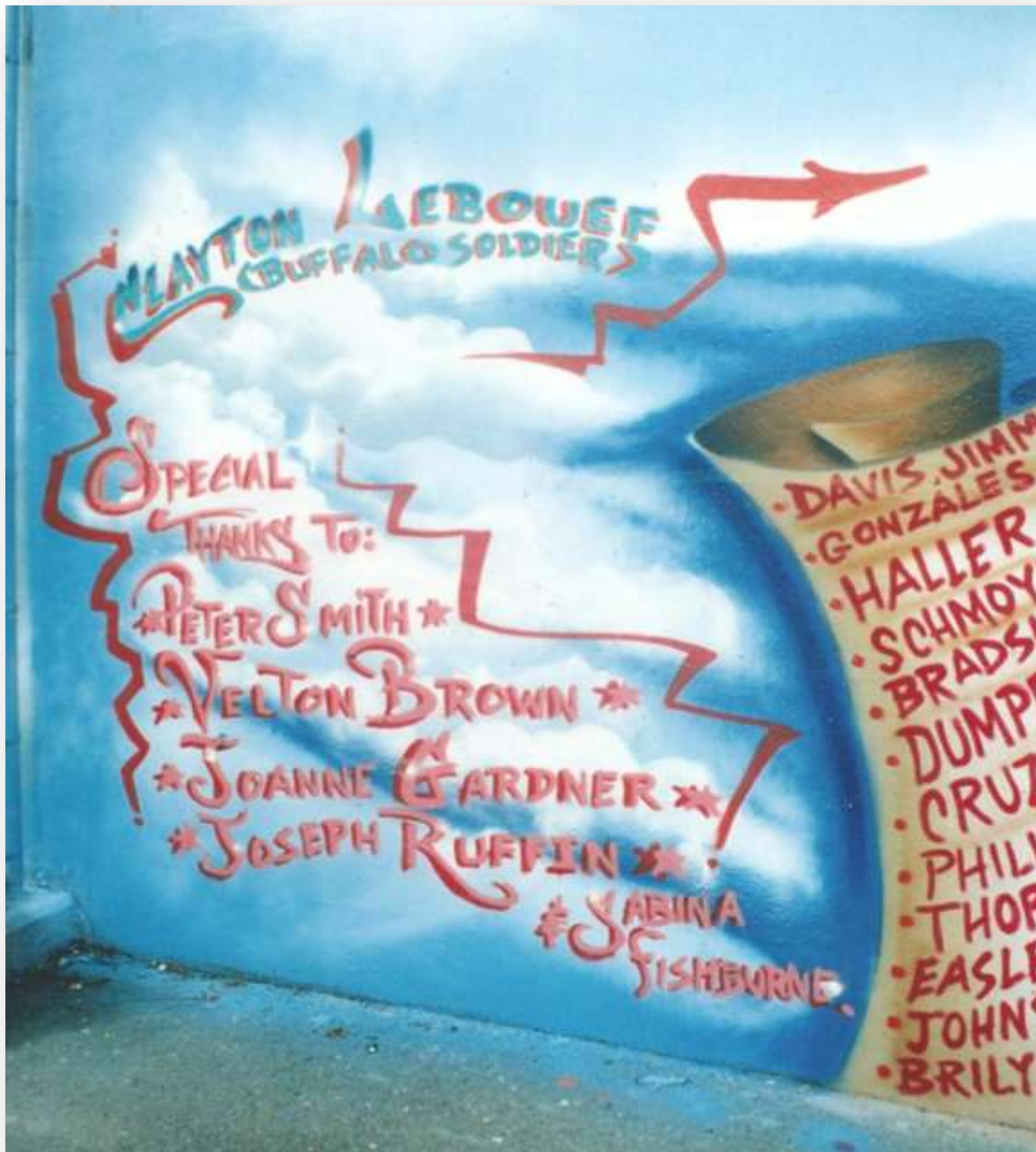
OTW Production: ITS TIME WE LEARN; KERZ & POSE2, 1992 -2002



OTW Production: LETS NOT FORGET; KERZ & PERONE, 2000



OTW Production: LETS NOT FORGET; KERZ & PERONE, 2000



OTW Production: LETS NOT FORGET; KERZ & PERONE, 2000



OTW Production: ITS OUT THERE; KERZ, 1992 - 2002



OTW Production: HOME OF THE BRAVE; BLAME, 1992 - 2002

SPECIAL
DEDICATION
TO OUR FAITHFUL
LOVED ONES

SANDRA FRAZIER. DEVEN RICHARDS. TONY (BIRD) AGIE. JOHANNIE MAE DAVIS. BRIAN POSO BISHOP.
DEREK BAUGH. NATHANIEL ROYER. CLIFFORD (TONTOS) SIMS. CLEVELAND CLAYTON SR. GEAN SWAN.
JINECA STEVENSON. WAYNE FAULK. JAMES (SKIPPER) MACK. FRANK DAVIS. LAWRENCE FUHER.
LAWANDA FIELDS. CHRISTINE FIELDS. LAWRENCE PAMPLIN. BERNICE DAVIS. RAENA COIBERT.
MONTIE FIELDS. WAYNE CURTIS. RONNIE MARTIN. THELMA WILKINS. TAKE SHA MONROE.
GARY (BROOK) BARNEY. KATIE MAE MCKINNIS. JAMES HARPER SIMS. ARTHUR TUTTILL. LAMONT MONROE.
CORVELL (CANN) ROSS. JIMMY MCKINNIS. EARLTON (MONEY) MARSHALL. LARRY WILLIAMS. MARGARET SUTTON.
SYLVESTER PARKER. SYLVIA PARKER. KEITH PARKER. DENISE PARKER. DELMAR HEATLEY.
SHERRY WELDON. TVESHA ELLISON. BRENDA WILLIAMS. ROOSEVELT WILLIAMS. MARY ELIA HOLLOWAY.
RICHARD BARTON. RICHARD BYRD. ISAAC DEFRANCE. RONALD LOFTON. ROBERTA DIXON.
JAMES MACKS. SHYEEH FAYLOR. AUTUMN MARTIN. RODNEY (ANIMAL) ROYAL. ERIC CORTEZ.
ALBERT MAJORS. CALVIN MACK. ANDERSON FIELDS. CHARLIE WALKER SR. ROSA ALVAREZ.
BARBARA (GAIL) SMITH. FRANK'S WALKER. DONITA KNOCK. SUE ANN KING. DONNA KNIGHT.
EDA MAE WASHINGTON. FLOYD WALKER. RUDOLPH DRIVER. EDGAR FREEMAN JR. EVELYN MYERS.
JANIE WASHINGTON. ROBERT WATTE. CONSTANCE (CONNIE) FIELDS. JACK HARPER. WILLIE LEE WILLIAMS.
LILLIAN ROBINSON. MATTHEW MARTIN. BRENDA COUCH. JAMIE LEE WHITNEY. VINCENT CHAMBERS.
NADINE WATKINS. MATTIE COLEMAN. JOYCE GRANT. ERNEST (SHIP) WATTS. MARGIE ALLEN.
ANTOINETTE DINKY LINTON. BETTY RILEY. MR. GRANT. MELINDA HARPER. NAOMI WATKINS.
DOROTHY (MOE) PEGRAM. MR. WALLACE. NORMAN KNOX. BESSIE JONES. VERONICA DeLUCA.
JOSEPHINE SMITH. PECOLA JOHNSON. BERNICE KNOX. JOSEPH BROWN. NAOMI RIPLEY. PHILLIP FAULK.
DANIEL BATTLE. GEORGE ANN PRESLEY. ALBERT SMITH SR. JUNE BIASMIN. WILLIAM NICHOLSON.
GRACE COLLINS. JULIA FRIDAY. MARY GREGORY. SYLVIA BIASMIN. VALERIE EVANS.
ROSETTA DUNCAN. AL YANCY. ELIA FITZGERALD. RALPH MILLER. RODNEY ROBINSON.



OTW Production: HOME OF THE BRAVE; BLAME, 1992 – 2002



OTW Production: HOME OF THE BRAVE; BLAME, 1992 – 2002



OTW Production: HOME OF THE BRAVE; BLAME- FSV, 1992 – 2002



OTW Production: HIV DIAMOND @ FAYE FIELD; ARTISTS UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME, 1992 - 2002



OTW ROLL CALL @ FAYE FIELD; MASE1, BENG, KERZ-ONE, CLARK, NEWER, JEL & NEZA, 1992 - 2002



OTW Canvas: X-TREME, 1992 - 2002



OTW Canvas: DON'T PLAY YOURSELF; PHYME, 1992 - 2002



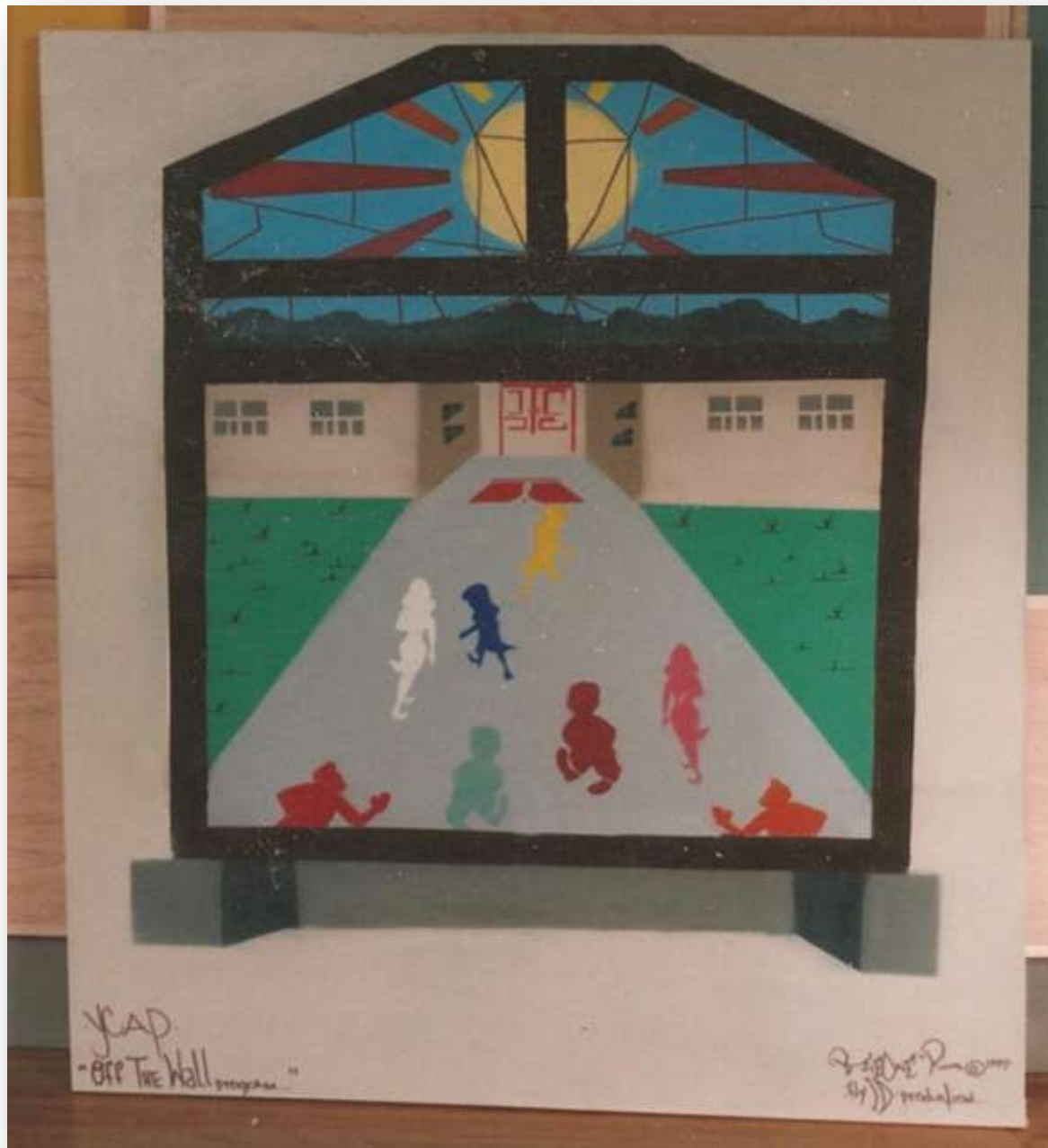
OTW Canvas: AIDS HURTS; POSE 2, 1992 - 2002



OTW Canvas: WAKE UP; MASE 1, 1992 - 2002



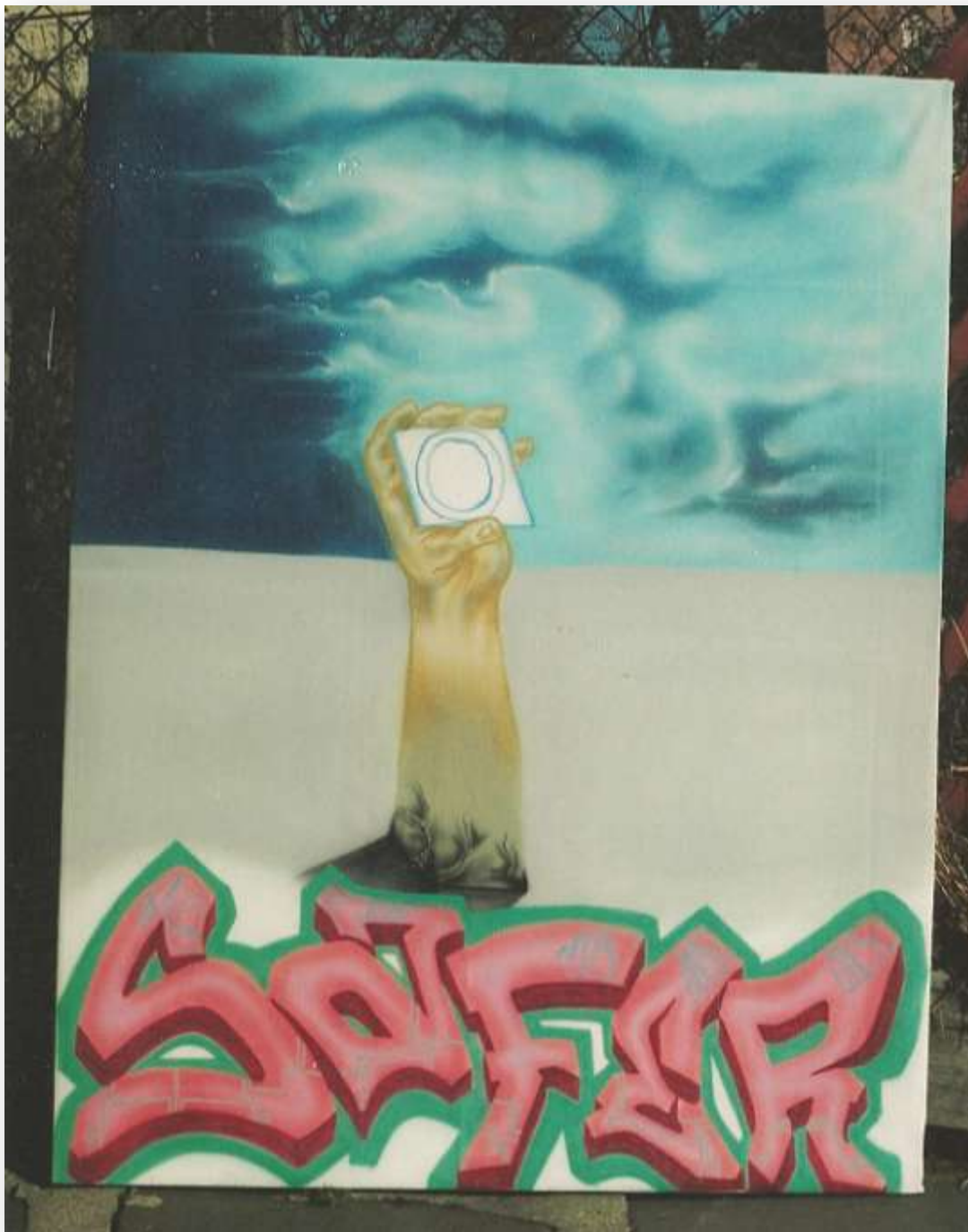
Hudson River Museum, 1992 - 2002



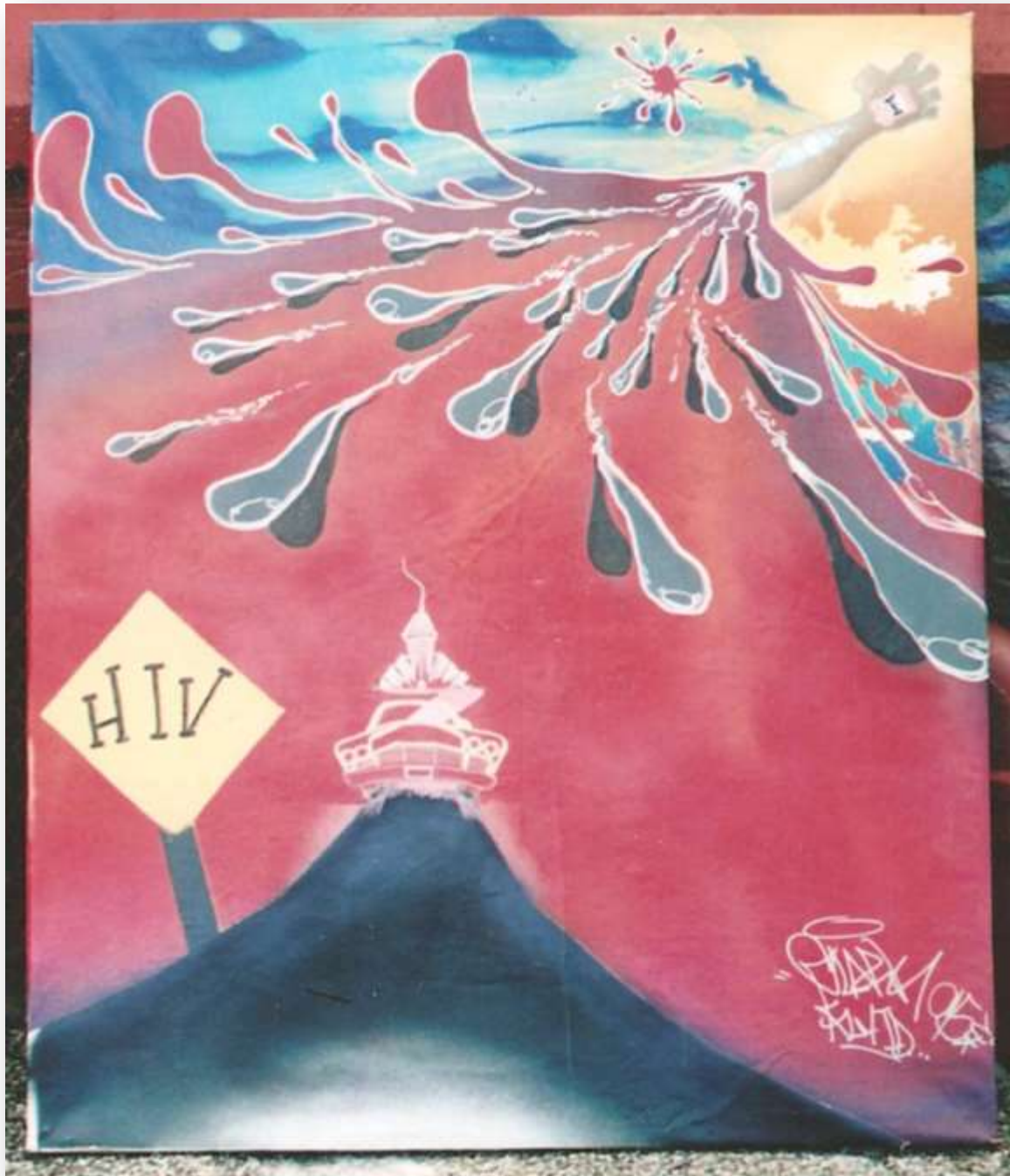
OTW Canvas: THE CLINIC; ZIE-ONE, 1992 - 2002



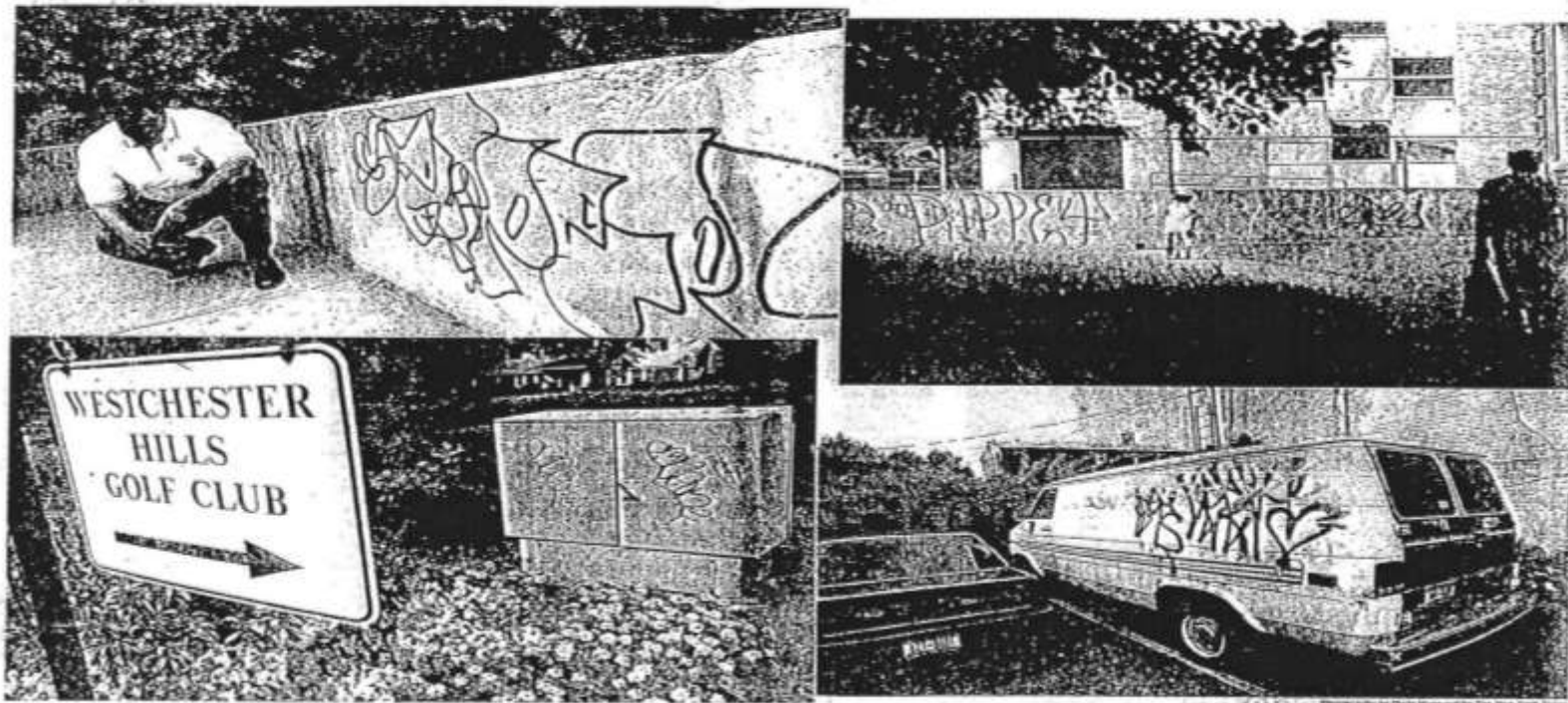
OTW Canvas: TIME TO PROTECT; SUDE, 1992 - 2002



OTW Canvas: SAFER; SUDE, 1992 - 2002



OTW Canvas: HIV; CLARK , 1995



Kenneth Davis, a Yonkers community police officer, top left, uses graffiti, like this on a wall on Highland Avenue in Yonkers, as a way of tracking gang activity. At Hawthorne Pearl School, graffiti marks a playground wall, top right. Even panel trucks can be objects of graffiti. At Westchester Hills Golf Club, a service box is covered with scrawls. Graffiti is becoming a more common part of the suburban scenery, making work for cleanup crews.

Graffiti as Art. As a Gang Tag. As a Mess.

Police Officers and Cleanup Squads Target the Spreading Spray Paint Blight

By MARC FERRIS

TO most people, graffiti is scrawl on the wall, defacement of property. To others, it can be a form of artistic expression. For some local police officers versed in deciphering the modern hieroglyphics, graffiti can track gangs and help determine the identities of their members.

However it is regarded, graffiti is spreading in Westchester, on playground equipment in Dobbs Ferry, a white wall of a historic villa along the Old Croton Aqueduct trail in Irvington, the back of a building in downtown Ardsley that faces the New York State Thruway, and the side of a house under construction on the Yonkers-Greenburgh border.

It has also appeared with a vengeance on street signs and local highways, where bridge pillars and retaining walls beckon like big blank canvases. New markings cover several layers of faded scrawls along the

concrete barriers at the hairpin turn leading from the Cross County Parkway into the southbound Hutchinson River Parkway, for instance. And in Greenburgh, the yellow and black signs along both sides of Jackson Avenue indicating a curve in the road at the intersection of Old Jackson Avenue are persistent targets for a vandal wielding red spray paint.

"It's a never-ending battle and it's very frustrating," said Colleen McKenna, a spokeswoman for the New York State Department of Transportation, which spends \$400,000 a year in Westchester to combat graffiti through a contract with ELQ Industries of Mamaroneck. "We clean it off one day and it seems like a day or two later, it's back."

Sometimes, the cleanup itself is ugly. Each batch of concrete comes out a different color, so no one shade of paint can match every surface. Cleanup crews often cover patches of graffiti with blotches of paint rather than an entire new coat.

Graffiti is becoming a more common part of the suburban wallpaper, perpetrated not just by gang members but teenagers of all social echelons.

"It was more prevalent in the cities, but it appears to be migrating," said Lieut. Don McArthur of the Westchester County Police, which patrols the parkways. "There are no numbers to back that up, but it's a constant battle. We've arrested kids from Scarsdale painting graffiti on bridge abutments. It doesn't know any economic strata."

In Putnam County, officials have been vexed by vandals who persistently cover an abandoned railroad bridge visible on Route 6 with large white letters. After a crew painted over the word "Brewster," preceded by an expletive, someone circumvented a secure fence and put up the name "Andrew" to memorialize Andrew McArdle, a high school student who died in a car crash in January. Graffiti covering a nearby fence read "Miss you, Andrew's Bridge," and "604," his football jersey number.

Retaining walls and buildings along Metro-North tracks also attract taggers, graffiti perpetrators who put up their tags, or signatures. "You can

Continued on Page 6

Spray-Paint Artists Who Create Open-Air Galleries, Legally

OUTLAW graffiti scribbles tarnish the reputation of legitimate graffiti artists, who put up their pieces with property owners' permission. Carlos Lopez, director of Off the Wall, an AIDS education and awareness program founded 10 years ago by Ken Davis, a Yonkers community police officer, and run by the Yonkers Community Action Program, tries to channel the creative impulse into constructive outlets and frames his message in a form that youths can relate to.

Though they have created more than 30 large-scale murals around town, the group suffers from the stigma attached to graffiti art.

"I have approached established artists to work with us and when they found out they would be working with graffiti, they turned us down," Mr. Lopez said. "We're not like kids off the street, tagging up on anybody's stuff. We're doing something positive and working on a higher level, but the knuckleheads ruin it for everybody."

Graffiti art emerged as a key component of hip-hop culture in the mid-1970's. Though break dancing, rapping and the distinctive styling of spray-paint artists endure as an expression of inner city youth, despite being co-opted by mass marketers, Mr. Lopez said.

Off the Wall has helped turn parts of Yonkers into an open-air art gallery. The group makes "masterpieces," large works known as "pieces," which take several hours of planning and execution, along with dozens of cans of paint. Financing for the program, which has a budget of \$60,000 a year, comes from the New York State Department of Health, the AIDS Institute and a New York State Community Service block grant.

Across from the group's headquarters on Ashburton Avenue and Jones Place, in a rundown part of town, stands a 10-foot-high, 30-foot-wide advertising mural that is almost as pristine as the day Alexis Hiraldo (whose tag is Hekst), 18 years old, and Daniel Gornet (Blame), 17, created it two months ago. The main section depicts a boxing ring. The message: "Don't Get in the Ring with Hard Hitting Heavyweights." Off the Wall's logo, emblazoned in bold letters in the lower left corner, along with smooch-like splashes of color,



add abstract flourishes.

In the mid-1990's, Off the Wall helped transform hundreds of square feet along a concrete walkway in the Vark Street Playground into a showcase. Eighteen artists put up their tags along 4-by-6-foot sections of the wall, which have faded and chipped over the years. Only a few neighborhood youths have added un-

authorized tags and irreverent remarks over the years, though one artist's work has been completely crossed out.

Mr. Lopez plans to hold an event later this fall that will wipe the slate clean and put up new work. He is inviting some of the region's best-known artists to contribute and give local teenagers something to

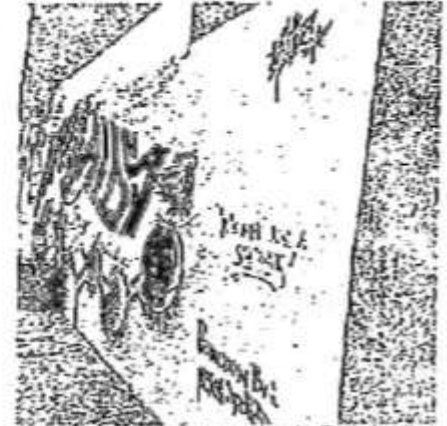


PHOTO BY DREW MASTARD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Carlos Lopez, director of Off the Wall, in front of work on a wall on Jones Place in Yonkers by a legitimate graffiti artist. More graffiti in Yonkers, above, done with permission of the property owner.

strive for. "Some people use graffiti in a destructive manner," Mr. Lopez said. "It can be constructive, too."

Mr. Lopez offers the ultimate incentive: \$400 to \$650 for a mural, and he pays artists to give school presentations.

"Once kids sit down and meet my artists, they know we came from the same streets," he said. "Once I grab them and get them here for 15 minutes, I've got them for the whole year and we can do AIDS education, job training and college preparation."

MARC FERRIS

The background image shows a red brick building. At the top left, there is a decorative archway with the words "PUBLIC SCHOOL" and "No 12" inscribed on it. Below this, on the left, is a dark arched doorway where a person in a blue dress is standing. To the right of the doorway are several windows. At the bottom of the image, there is a large, colorful mural featuring abstract shapes, a sun, and a figure. The text "OFF THE WALL - STAFF" is overlaid in white on the upper part of the image.

OFF THE WALL - STAFF

Judith Wilson (YCAP Executive Director)

Annie Kaiser (Executive Director Youth Bureau)

Karen D. Carroll (Health Instructor)

Ken Davis (Cofounder/Field Coordinator/ Photographer)

Joanne Gardner (Program Director)

Carlos Lopez (Director)

Lawrence Smyj (Community & Property Supporter)

Special Thanks

New York State Health Department AIDs Institute

OFF THE WALL - GRAF WRITERS/ARTISTS

BAE, BEK (POET), BENG, BENT, BLAME, BOMBS, CES, CHOSE, CLARK, CLIFTON, HAMMA, HEEL, HEFROE, HEKS, IKE, JADE, JAES, JEL, JIGS, JUDE, KERZ, KINGBEE, KOOL, KOR, MARIA, MASE-1, MERK, NANCY, NEKST, NEWER, NEZA, OVIE, PASE, PER-ONE, PHYME, POSE-2, RIBS, SANE, SAY-SIXX, SEM, SERV, SIAR, SMK, SONE, SUDE, TROME, WISE, X-TREME & ZIE.



