



Artist leaves mark on swim center



Written by

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Artist Paul Hobson sat on his knees and leaned in closely to the barely visible images sandblasted into the concrete deck, carefully bringing them to life with each stroke of his paintbrush.

The series of stop-action images of divers and swimmers take people from the entrance gate to the changing and multipurpose rooms of the new Palm Desert Aquatic Center.

Just a few days before the aquatic center opened Saturday, the San Diego artist applied color to the figures as crews from T.B. Penick of San Diego sandblasted them into the concrete.

A heavy broom finish on the concrete to keep people from slipping made it a little harder to paint, Hobson said.

“But it adds character” to the finish, he said.

The images are taken from a swimming instructor's handbook.

“I was a swimming coach in my younger years,” Hobson said.

Before there was video, instructors used a handbook with stop-action drawings showing how swimmers should situate their bodies for certain dives and strokes, Hobson said.

An artist for about 25 years, Hobson was chosen early in 2010 from 60 artists who applied for the \$45,800 aquatic center commission, public art coordinator Deborah Gomez said.

Gomez narrowed the applicants to three and the Art in Public Places Commission and City Council made the final decision.

Early in his career, Hobson worked for Austrian-American artist Herbert Bayer, who was the design consultant for Atlantic Richfield Co.

That's where Hobson said he learned to paint. But Bayer was also doing public art and would send Hobson to oversee the

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installation of the pieces.

That got Hobson interested in public art and working for government entities, he said.

He began to see where artwork can make everything, from gates to buildings and everything in between, more appealing to see.

"If an artist is involved in it rounds out the vision," Hobson said.

Among his works is a 50-foot rolling gate at the entrance to Ventura's water treatment plant, which he dressed up with images of machinery in the plant, made of galvanized steel.

He just completed a wall sculpture at the new Marriott San Diego Hotel and Marina that depicts the tidal flows of San Diego Bay.

At night the artwork is silhouetted against a soft, always changing colored glow cast by LED lighting on the background wall.

"I like to create things but I really enjoy being on the job site," he said, putting everything into place.

There's a satisfaction, he said, that comes with the immortality of artwork that is part of a structure.

"It lives for years and years after you're gone."



Artist **Paul Hobson** of San Diego applies acrylic stain to figures sandblasted into the pool deck at the Palm Desert Aquatic Center. / Crystal Chatham Palm Desert Sun

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