

# World's Largest Painting

By Roderick Mason Faber

Ever since two of them went up, I've been wishing there were three towers to the World Trade Center. Now I needn't harbor such perverse trinitarian longings. The twin towers have acquired a suitably overscale sibling in what may be the world's largest painting.

Literally danced onto the cratered pavement of the West Side Highway by Tia Ballantine and Brendt Berger (with the help of broom-handled rollers), the 800-by-75 feet painting used up more than 130 gallons of permanent exterior government-surplus paint. The two artists, decorated veterans of downtown art struggles, each wore out a pair of shoes in the fortnight it took to complete the mammoth elevated carpet. No permit to paint was asked for and none granted; it is now a fait accompli of the cityscape and is so recognized. A first-rate city-certified Calder stabile stands hidden like a discarded toy in the shadow of the painting at the base of the North Tower.

Ballantine and Berger did much of the initial work on the painting under cover of darkness. I have seen an entire Albanian shantytown built almost overnight on the hipbone of the Acropolis, but this is a feat of a different order: it is meant to be a serious act of play, art in the spirit of Philippe Petit and George Willig. Paul Klee once said that all pictorial art "springs from movement, is

itself fixed in movement, and is perceived through movement." Ballantine and Berger call their piece "a dance, a marriage ceremony." They do *not* call it Conceptual Art, where the static documentation of the work becomes the work itself.

Although the painting can be (and has been) jogged on, slept on, ridden on, somersaulted on, and walked in, as one walks in a pathless garden, it is ideally seen from above, especially from the towers. Tiepolo painted for observers who bent over backwards in order to look up; Ballantine and Berger, for those who bend forward to look down. We no longer build churches with Tiepolo'd ceilings; in this relentlessly secular city we build planetariums. Now the heavens as we see them are brought indoors, contained even in movies like *2001* and *Star Wars*. Ballantine and Berger put the observer, not the work of art, in the sky. They do this not so the earth that is looked down on may be contained, but so it will open up in its immensity and become-of-the-earth celestial.

When the vagabonds from Magna Techna finally arrive in their souped-up saucers, will they see what may be the world's largest painting as the word of words from the zosphere? It all depends on how permanent the West Side Highway is. Or the World Trade Center.