

Horse-power display for Yonge St. motorists

Public art in Toronto is galloping ahead.

In the last few weeks, *The Iron Horse*, a site-specific new work by Robert Sprachman, was installed on the old railway bridge that crosses Yonge St. just south of Merton St.

The piece, which consists of 12 equines — or rather, equine silhouettes — has suddenly brought visual interest to a structure that was abandoned ages ago and hasn't been used, even by pedestrians, since.

Still, the bridge remains and God knows how many cars pass beneath it during an average day.

All of which means it's ideal for some kind of public artwork.

The city already had been tarting up the bridge, turning the track into a path and adding a set of stairs from the sidewalk.

But with Sprachman's opus in place, the bridge is transformed; what was just another part of Toronto's crumbling infrastructure is now a positive element of the city.

That's no small accomplishment and certainly it's one to which all of us in Metro should pay close attention. Anything that can be done to improve the deteriorating city, or at least make it look better, is welcome.

Art

CHRISTOPHER HUME



"The horse was the backbone of the development of civilization," writes Sprachman, "providing the brute strength for the cultivation of fields, the construction of buildings and for transportation. The appearance of a herd of horses in our city core is as anachronistic as the railroad might soon be."

Indeed, he might have added, as anachronistic as the city itself might soon be.

More than anything, Sprachman reminds us that urbanity must be worked at; it can't be created out of nothing. Cities must be cultivated and taken care of; left alone they fall apart. Toronto is no exception.

Whether you love Sprachman's horses or think they're completely silly, there's no denying they represent a serious attempt to add a layer of inter-



BORIS SPREMO / TORONTO STAR

ROBERT SPRACHMAN'S iron horses transform abandoned Yonge St. railway bridge.

est. The intentions are as important as the piece itself.

"I have been responsible for all aspects of this project," the artist says, "from fundraising to fabrication and installation."

The city agreed to the scheme in January, and *The Iron Horse* will be on display to November.

METRO HALL MURAL

THOUGH IT'S not quite as public as the Sprachman piece, Metro has a new mural for all the world to see.

Located at the east end of Metro Hall by the entrance to Metro Centre, it was painted by

Toronto artist Andrew Owen and a team of students from the local boards of education.

The large, three-walled work sure helps enliven the deadly spaces of this, the most anonymous civic complex around. Its bright colors and bold imagery turn blank interior surfaces into

a scream of defiance against the very forces that give us Metro Halls in the first place.

It is about humanizing our surroundings — a modern-day variation on cave-painting, except now the caves are downtown and man-made.

Like his prehistoric predecessors, Owen has filled the space with pictures of the world around him. In his case, however, that doesn't mean woolly mammoths or sabre-toothed tigers, but dying soldiers and refrigerators. It also means a view of planet Earth taken from space, clasped hands, a child, an iris and a selection of coins from different countries.

In other words, it is a thoroughly contemporary kind of work, a mixing and matching of imagery in an attempt to communicate some sense of real-world complexity.

One would be reluctant to read too much into Owen's mural. It struck me as more intuitive than intellectual. In its own way, it represents the same impulse that drove primitive man to leave a handprint in a hostile world as a record of his own existence.

Anyone who has wandered through Metro Hall will understand where that impulse comes from.