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TELUS MURAL

Review by JON DUNBAR

In public, people rarely look up. We like to have high ceilings, which means that half the volume of the rooms we design goes completely unused, and completely unnoticed. Maybe that's why the Telus mural was put in such a high place.

The mural, donated by Telus in 1999, was placed above the doors at the north end of HUB International at the University of Alberta, spanning the width of the mall corridor. Meant to represent the spirit of co-operation between the telecommunications giant and the University, two aggressively expansionist corporations, the mural reveals an exasperating narrative about Telus' aspirations for markets bigger than we can provide. For instance, why, in a mural about the history of Edmonton, would artist Kim Tag draw in a New York City skyline? Are they so excited about global domination that they just let it slip? The obvious explanation is that Telus wishes to show Edmonton opening its doors to the world, or some other neo-liberal tripe, but the fact remains that this painting shows a distinct jump away from our city.

The mural, titled "Trade and Commerce: The History of Edmonton," depicts a left-to-right chronological history of our city.

Starting with the arrival of European settlers, bringing civilization to the indigenous savages (as well as rifles and plague-infested blankets) the mural goes on to sketch a quick history of modernization and the construction of Edmonton, up to the stage where the world is taken over by business executives holding cell phones to their ears. Irritatingly, not one of them is depicted waiting an hour on hold to speak to a Telus representative. After that, things get tricky.

The next link in our chain shows crowds scurrying to our illustrious International Airport to flee the city, and suddenly the Edmonton locales disappear, which is where we catch up with the World Trade Centre. At this point the mural goes from vaguely insulting to totally baffling, when we see an ocean class luxury liner in front of a city skyline. But that's not the North Saskatchewan River, and if that's Edmonton, what's the World Trade Centre doing there? It's kind of hard to see the twin towers at first, because they're *obscured* behind an airplane. The narrative goes on to show a Japanese bullet train, and concludes with an abstract image of a map of the world projected out of a telephone handset. From settlers appearing

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Ignored are the many virtues of our fair city, such as its many festivals, that gigantic eyesore listed in Guinness as the world's largest mall, and those buffalo statues lining Gateway Boulevard. This mural depicts all that is great about our city from the point of view of a soulless telecommunications executive, at the expense of all other viewpoints.

Someone should have addressed these issues long ago, but perhaps the mural didn't seem important enough. After the terrorist attacks rendered a portion of this painting an anachronism, it becomes important again to ask why Telus approved a mural that so plainly bends the message it's trying to deliver. The fact that there's a NYC skyline in a mural that's supposed to represent Telus' commitment to Edmonton says something about the quality of service we can expect from them in the future.

Telus could not be reached for comment. **53**

Photo: Telus sponsored mural, "Trade and Commerce: The History of Edmonton," Kim Tag, 1999.

