



Josef Kristofoletti's mural at CERN in Switzerland is a diagram of a particle detector rendered in a vibrant color palette.

The Art in Architecture

by Igor Siddiqui

Austin-based artist Josef Kristofoletti believes in a reciprocal and mutually enriching relationship between paintings and buildings. He cites diverse influences — including prehistoric caves, Renaissance paintings, and iconoclastic works of architecture such as Rudolf Steiner's *Goetheanum* — as not only sources of personal inspiration but examples of rich traditions that continue to inform contemporary art and design practice.

With this back story in mind, it's particularly poignant that Kristofoletti selected a brand of acrylic paint called Lascaux (after the French caves famous for Paleolithic paintings) for his most ambitious realized artwork to date. Located in Switzerland, the four-story mural occupies two adjacent exterior walls at CERN, the largest particle physics laboratory in the world. The project started with an unsolicited proposal and evolved into a two-year

collaboration with the European Organization for Nuclear Research. The resulting painting, completed in 2009, is a vibrant, full-color diagram of CERN's massive particle detector. Through color, shape, perspective, and pattern, the artwork provides a new facade for the existing building, visually interpreting and revealing the highly sensitive and always hidden technology within. Kristofoletti drew and painted the entire mural himself, a process that required him to spend more than four months at the site. (He also had to complete extensive nuclear hazard management training in order to obtain permission to paint at the facility.)

Educated as a painter at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Kristofoletti started using walls in lieu of stretched canvas early in his career. The goal was to diminish paintings' perceived status as objects. "When you paint on a wall, the art becomes immaterial," he explains. "It's no longer about the object. At the same time, the painting takes on the weight

Of Note



Clockwise from top left

Kristofoletti working at CERN; a commissioned wall painting for Gensler offices in downtown Austin; a mural for the facade of Teatro Balboa in Panama City (bottom).



of the whole building; ... you can literally be in [the painting].” While in Italy, Kristofoletti studied traditional frescoes while also gaining exposure to emerging trends in urban street art; his artistic approach evolved further, eventually coalescing in a commitment to painting as a spatial practice at the scale of architecture. Over the past decade, he has developed a portfolio that reflects his view of the role of art in the built environment, with murals painted both on and inside buildings, including commissioned as well as self-initiated projects. Some are conceived as permanent installations; others are deliberately ephemeral.

In 2010, Kristofoletti moved to Austin, where he now maintains a full-time studio practice. While he continues to work internationally — at the last *Bienal del Sur* in Panama City, for example, he painted a mural for the facade of *Teatro Balboa* — his practice is also leaving a visible mark on his current hometown. Shortly after arriving in Austin, he was the first artist to produce a full mural at the HOPE Outdoor Gallery on Castle Hill; the venue has since become an important hub for street art in Austin. In a very different type of setting, Kristofoletti’s signature combination of bold geometries and rich hues graces the interiors of Gensler’s office at the W Hotel & Residences downtown. In this mural, a bundle of elongated cylinders appears to float overhead, terminating in the form of a sectional drawing as the wall turns the corner. When it is completed later this fall, a piece for the newly renovated entrance lobby of the Castilian, a student housing high-rise adjacent to The University of Texas at Austin campus, will similarly engage viewers’ perception of spatial depth and implied volume.



PHOTOS COURTESY JOSEF KRISTOFOLETTI.



Kristofoletti is currently at work on a commission for a permanent installation at Austin's iconic Seaholm Power Plant. For the occasion, he is collaborating with Sten Lex, the celebrated Italian street artist duo known for their exquisitely detailed large-scale paper stencil works. Also currently in the planning phase is an artwork for Drawing Lines, a citywide project for which Kristofoletti was selected as one of ten artists paired with each of Austin's newly drawn City Council districts. Working with District 6, he intends to develop a mural at the Mansfield Dam, a site whose selection reflects his continuing interest in issues of energy, technology, and science.

In contemporary cities, murals and street art are frequently viewed as creative activities that are overlaid or imposed on already existing architectural surfaces. While this can be a powerful means of transforming existing environments — as the work of artists like Kristofoletti regularly

demonstrates — it also brings up the question of how such public works of art may be more effectively integrated into the planning, design, and construction of new buildings and spaces. Given the growth and urban transformation of many Texas cities, questions about new models of connection between art and architecture acquire new relevance. “Traditionally, painting has always existed as a part of architecture,” says Kristofoletti, who sees new real estate developments in Austin and other cities as a potentially significant opportunity for artists. The painter's hope is that amid this flux, artists, much like architects, will begin to be integrated into the development process at the earliest stages. His work is a testament to the ability of such an approach to wholly transform our perceptions of the environments in which we live.

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At Canopy in Austin, Kristofoletti conceived a mural that conveys a sense of depth through the use of color, gradient, and perspective.