

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

© 1997 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

VOL. CXXXVI NO. 39 WE/RV ***

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1997

INTERNET ADDRESS: <http://wsj.com>

... 75 CENTS

Where Others Saw A Derrick, One Man Saw Only a Canvas

By KATHRYN KRANHOLD

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

BEVERLY HILLS—For his next project, Los Angeles artist Ed Massey plans to try a mixed medium: oil and acrylics. Or, to put it more accurately: crude oil and acrylics.

Starting sometime in the next six months, Mr. Massey will direct the painting of a 10,000-square-foot floral mural on the city's only oil derrick, located on the campus of Beverly Hills High School.

The derrick, which pumps oil from several wells, yields about 750 barrels of crude a day, bringing in about \$300,000 a year for the local school board. The city and several homeowners in the area also receive revenue from the oil. The operation is run by Venoco Inc., a Santa Barbara company, which is looking to start drilling for new wells in the area this spring.

'A Great Vehicle'

The derrick is "a rather homely looking device sticking out of the ground," says Lillian Raffel, vice president of the Beverly Hills Board of Education. "Ed thought this was a great vehicle for some public art."

The project—twice the size of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, according to the artist—will have a total of 92 panels on the derrick's four sides. Each side will represent a different season.

A key component of the \$1 million project—expected to be paid for through corporate and individual contributions—will be the participation of more than 4,000 seriously ill children at hospitals statewide.

Mr. Massey plans to enlist them to paint the 92 panels, which will then become part of the insulation that covers the derrick.

Mr. Massey, who is currently at work on a public-art project on homelessness, has always provoked debate with his art. This time, it was no different.

Tone It Down

The 33-year-old Mr. Massey, himself a Beverly Hills High graduate, first discussed his derrick idea with Ms. Raffel about two years ago. From there, Mr. Massey had to meet with the entire school board, the city's art commission, city architects, Venoco executives and the City Council. The art commission asked Mr. Massey to tone down the floral project.

"It took a long time for him to convince people that this was going to look good because it sticks up there where everyone can see it," says City Manager Mark Scott.