

Exploring New York

Groove to the energy of Times Square and the largest display of street art in town. Plus hot Big Apple neighborhoods, a tour of Wall Street, and more.



THE CITY SCENE

Take an established artist known for his electrifying paintings of New York street life. Add five hip-to-the-minute high-school students, all aspiring artists and all eager to make their mark not only in—but also on their hometown. Then throw in an empty canvas, or, in this case, a blank wall on West 53rd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue that measures 225 feet long and 23 feet high. The result is what *The New York Times* has called "the largest example of hand-painted street art in New York City."



TOP: Mid-July and the back wall of Roseland Ballroom gets a fresh lick of paint. **Above:** Artist Tom Christopher (second from right) confers with student muralists about their tribute to Times Square.

The Roseland Mural is loud, brash and in-your-face—just like Times Square, its subject. The Times Square Business Improvement District (BID) initiated the work as a community service project that would give meaningful summer employment to a group of inner-city youngsters at the same time that it would add something permanent and inspirational to the ongoing revitalization of the Times Square neighborhood. Cooperating with the Times Square BID were artist Tom Christopher; five apprentice mural painters from New York's High School of Graphic Communication Arts; Outdoor Systems,

which assigned one of its crews of professional sign painters to the endeavor; and Roseland, on whose mammoth rear wall the mural came to life; (Roseland is the legendary dance palace and former hub of New York nightlife, where big bands led by Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller once kept thousands of happy feet jiving the night away; ballroom dancing is still on the card there, as are rock concerts.) What you will see when you walk along this stretch of the theatre district, either before or after attending a Broadway show, is as spontaneous as graffiti but as disciplined as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The top two-thirds of the mural, with its

nine panels depicting kinetic perspectives of buses, taxicabs, neon signs and bicycle messengers, is the work of Tom Christopher. At street level below are images chosen and painted by the students. Saxophones, boom boxes, high-heel dancing shoes, T-shirts, a corner newsstand, theatre tickets, a camera and a subway entrance are among these defining icons of Times Square. This being New York, and with more than a touch of irony, the wall has been protected for posterity with an anti-graffiti coating. Beyond its size and ambition, however, the mural is a labor of love....