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Section: Local

Grad student's paintings now hang in City Hall

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CLAREMONT - When city officials set out to establish a permanent art collection, they turned their attention first to work produced locally. The city recently made its first purchase from **Claremont Graduate University** student Elizabeth Gahan, a 25-year-old San Diego native who sold four paintings to the city.

The paintings, currently hanging near City Hall's public lobby, depict images of urban architecture juxtaposed against richly colored open areas of canvas. The work will soon be transferred to the Alexander Hughes Community Center, where Francine Baker, the city's public art coordinator, is working to establish a permanent collection of artwork produced by local artists. "We are a city rich in art, and instead of putting up posters it's nice to have original works of art," Baker said.

Gahan said the paintings currently hanging in City Hall were inspired by a year she spent living in Barcelona, Spain. During that year, she traveled through Europe taking pictures of urban architecture, particularly buildings that she feels reflect the unique cultures in the region. "I use architecture as a key visual tool, and I use it to talk about people," Gahan said.

Gahan originally loaned the paintings to the city, but Baker and others liked her work so much they decided to purchase it. "I think it's a type of work that appeals to a lot of different tastes," Baker said. "It is more widely accepted art versus some others that may be more difficult for more people to comprehend and enjoy on a long-term basis."

During Baker's eight years as public art coordinator, she has worked on several art projects that have left a mark on the character of the city's downtown Village. Baker, along with help from a committee, helped choose the large mosaic on the First Street parking structure in the city's downtown Village Expansion shopping area.

Councilwoman Linda Elderkin was part of that process before she was elected to the council. "I love the public art in the city, as exemplified by the angel (at Indian Hill Boulevard and Harrison Avenue) and the beautiful mosaic on the garage," Elderkin said.

Baker has long worked with **Claremont Graduate University** to display student-produced art in the hallways of City Hall. The work helps add character to a bureaucratic institution not known for color. "I get people calling me that want to buy the work," Baker said. "They really appreciate it being there. I get comments about it all the time."

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