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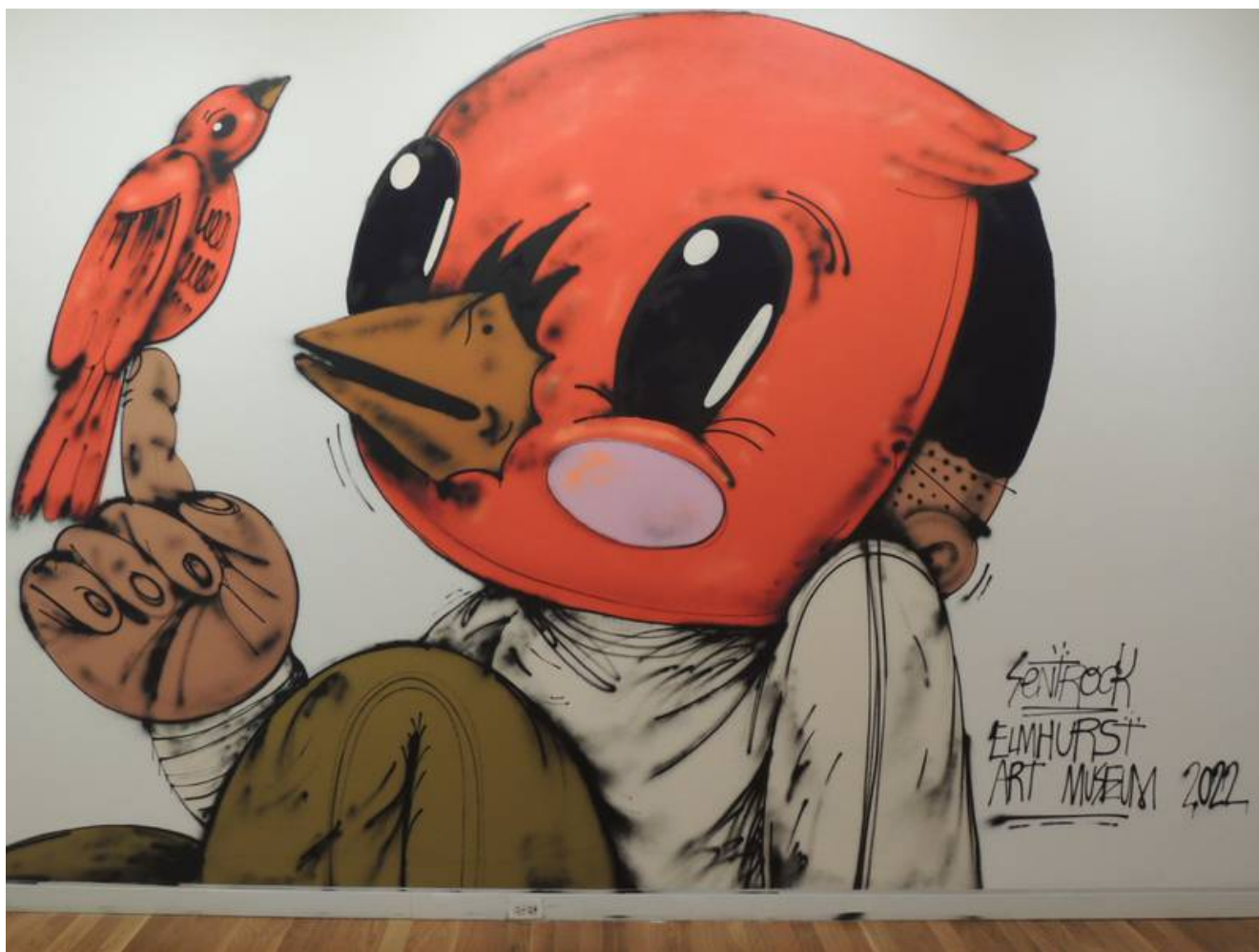
Elmhurst Art Museum opens Pilsen-based street artist Sentrock exhibit

By Graydon Megan
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Street artist Sentrock painted a mural of his Bird City Saint character on the wall of the first gallery of his Elmhurst Art Museum exhibition. (Gravdon Megan / Pioneer Press)

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It's street art that blends a young boy's hopes for the future and new beginnings with the Mexican cultural tradition of masks in new works by Joseph Perez, best known as "Sentrock," opening a new exhibition and programs at the Elmhurst Art Museum now through Jan. 15 of next year.

"Sentrock: The Boy Who Wanted to Fly" is the first solo museum show of Pilsen-based Sentrock, "who seeks to uplift and empower youth through his murals and educational projects," according to the Museum's website.



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The Elmhurst Art Museum exhibit runs from Sept. 9 to Jan. 15 of next year. (Graydon Megan / Pioneer Press)

The art in the museum show features his character Bird City Saint in individual paintings, a mural painted with house paint and spray paint directly on a gallery wall at the start of the exhibition and a large sculpture of the character below a floral arrangement representing the bird he is often pictured with.

There is also a larger than life-size bird house.

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The artist said when he started painting he painted a lot of birds, which represented freedom and escape. In Mexican culture, he said, masks can be used to represent an alter ego as well as a superhero.

The 36-year-old grew up in Phoenix, which he and his friends called “Bird City,” and came to Chicago about 12 years ago to study at Columbia College.

Sentrock, who has painted many large outdoor murals around Chicago, talked recently with Pioneer Press about his development as an artist.



Joseph Perez, known as Sentrock, with a painting of his Bird City Saint character. (Graydon Megan / Pioneer Press)

“How it started, a muralist came to my school when I was in first grade,” he said. “I was a shy kid — I discovered art and I loved it. When I was 14 or 15 (years old) in high school, I decided to try it on my own so that muralist in grade school made a big impression.”

Sentrock is aiming to make a similar impression on other young people with his accessible and public art, including the Elmhurst Art Museum exhibition.

“I feel it’s very family friendly,” he said. “I wanted to make it easily inspiring — not conceptual — more of a visual narrative. I thought of a family who may shy away from museums and galleries.”

Those visual narratives include paintings, murals, prints and commissioned work.

In the tradition of street art, he still uses house paint and spray paint and other “materials that cover” along with paintings on canvas using mixed media of oils, pastels and acrylics.

The richly illustrated brochure for the Elmhurst Art Museum exhibition lists a dozen murals in Chicago for those interested in a self-guided tour of some of his work. The brochure also includes a coloring page designed by the artist.

The artist said the Sentrock name is a combination of nicknames — the Sent from what his friends called him in Arizona and rock, a generic nickname from break dancing.

While much of his public work has been in the Chicago area, Sentrock sees a wider horizon. He’s convinced that his art would be welcomed in France, Spain and Japan.

“My goal is to take my story global,” he said. “I think (those places) will love me. So like my character, I want to be flying.”



An oversized bird house is part of the exhibit.
(Graydon Megan / Pioneer Press)

The Elmhurst Art Museum exhibition opened on Sept. 9. Special events around the exhibition include a family day workshop led by Sentrock on Saturday, Sept. 17, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.; a conversation with Sentrock on Saturday, Oct. 1, from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.; and a Sentrock pop-up shop on Saturday afternoon, Dec. 3.

The museum, 150 Cottage Hill Ave., is generally open Wednesdays and Thursdays from noon to 5 p.m.. Fridays through Sundays, hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

More information on the exhibition and related programs is available at: [Sentrock: The Boy Who Wanted to Fly | Elmhurst Art Museum](#).

Graydon Megan is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.



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